SPIFFY HENSHAW

PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

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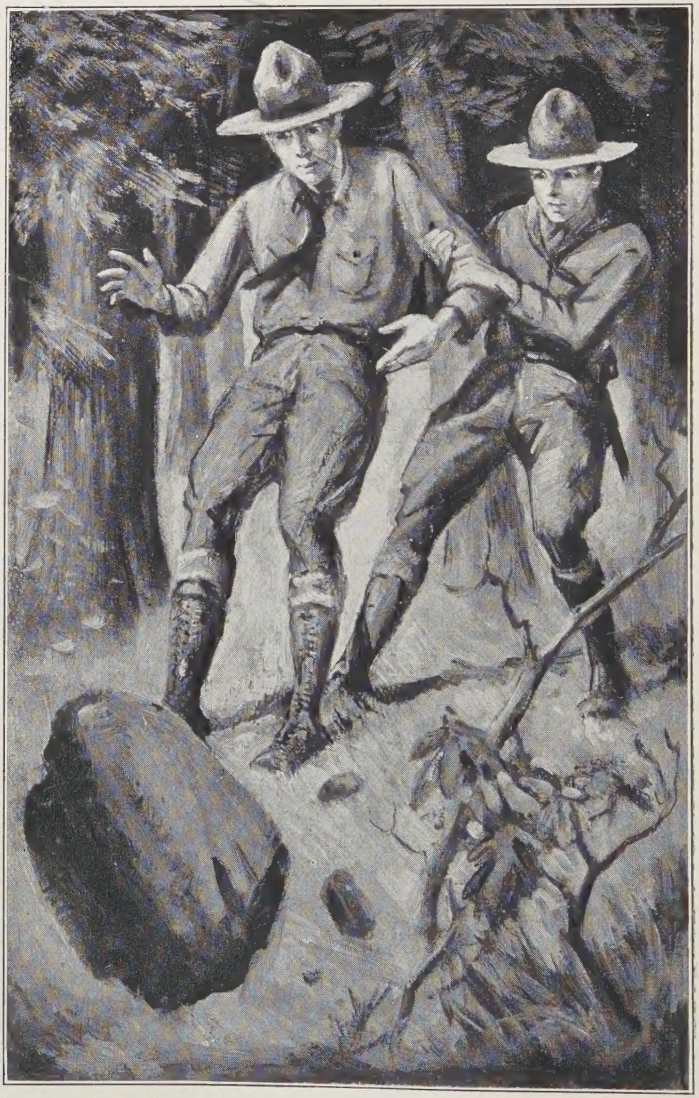

SPIFFY GRABBED TOM AND PULLED HIM BACK JUST IN TIME.

Spiffy Henshaw. *Frontispiece* (*Page* 131)

SPIFFY HENSHAW

By

PERCY KEESE FITZHUGH

Author of

THE TOM SLADE BOOKS
THE ROY BLAKELEY BOOKS
THE PEE-WEE HARRIS BOOKS
THE WESTY MARTIN BOOKS

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SPIFFY HENSHAW

CHAPTER I

THE WAY OF THE TRANSGRESSOR

Spiffy Henshaw had been washing dishes for two whole weeks. That is, it seemed to him as if it had been two weeks but in reality it was only three times a day for fourteen days.

In answer to his numerous complaints, his scoutmaster had told him that the way of the transgressor was hard and though Spiffy agreed with him the words slipped off his shoulders as lightly as the summer rain.

There had been a new transgression each day of his protracted sentence, until at the end of the week it seemed quite likely that his superiors would inflict another fortnight's penance upon him. That was to be in the form of peeling potatoes in the large kitchen at Kanawauke.

Therefore, Spiffy immediately sought to re-

taliate this imminent penalty and succeeded in capturing a muskrat and hiding it between the snow-white sheets of his scoutmaster's cot. This appeased his hunger for vengeance but added to his duties in the kitchen. He was commanded to sweep it up after every meal.

This long term of punishment was the result of one of Spiffy's major transgressions. He swam the lake one night in defiance of the camp rules and was sentenced next morning for kitchen duty. This order was to take effect immediately after breakfast but instead, Spiffy had left the waters of Kanawauke far behind him and was intent on reaching his parents' home in Jersey City rather than expiate his folly in such ignoble pursuits.

His purpose was thwarted however, by Tom Slade, the young camp assistant of Temple Camp at Black Lake, who was on a little adventure that summer in the foothills of Bear Mountain. Spiffy walked into the cabin early in the evening and gave a frank account of himself.

Before ten minutes had passed, Tom had suc-

ceeded in making the runaway believe that he wasn't a quitter and that he *would* go back to his camp and take what was coming to him. Also he had given up his beloved flashy stickpin that had earned him the famous cognomen that would cling to him for life. Tom had told him that it was a signal for HELP. That brought him to his senses and sent him scurrying back to Kanawauke.

The next morning he was commended for his fine conscience and remanded for sentence, and hardly was the breakfast over before he was standing at the big sink, toiling away at a job that was thoroughly loathsome to him. It was only the thoughts of Tom Slade that kept his impish desires in check.

"Gee, he's one swell guy," he said as he rattled the heavy dishes. "He's not like the scouts around here—gee, I haven't any use for scouts. None of them, 'cepting that Slade. I liked him right off. Said he came from Bridgeboro. That's the place where my aunt and uncle live—I'd like to go there some day."

The chef who was busy at the stove looked

questioningly at the mumbling boy and decided that he was just another queer kid. But there was nothing queer about Spiffy at all. He was wilful and stubborn to an alarming degree and when mischief stalked his keen young brain, nothing could stop him. And until his meeting with Tom Slade nothing had.

He was destined not to see Tom again for a long time but he never forgot the little bits of common sense that that young man had imparted to him during their short meeting. His desire to create havoc in the peaceful camp was as strong as ever but he knew that never again would he be a quitter.

And so he started his acquaintance with potatoes after his adventure with the muskrat. When he was at this occupation the thought occurred to him that his superiors might reconsider their sentence upon him if he put a good quantity of dry mustard in with the potatoes. The innocent looking can stood on a line with his sparkling black eyes just under the cupboard and the chef had stepped out of the kitchen for a few minutes.

The peace of Kanawauke camp was indeed threatened that luncheon hour by Spiffy's latest prank. His scoutmaster and camp manager were at a loss to know just what could be done about him. Punishment seemed to be only another form of mischief, and they at last decided to inform his parents that they might write and order him home.

Their wish was soon realized as Mr. Henshaw sent his son a peremptory note demanding his return home at once. Also a letter of apology was dispatched to the powers that be in Kanawauke, on behalf of this same mischief maker and some money for his carfare was enclosed in care of the scoutmaster to insure his return home.

Spiffy accepted this money humbly and seemed indeed repentant at that moment. He asked permission to stay until the morrow and that same afternoon took a trip into the nearest village and bought a scout suit for a poor member of his patrol. Thus he was without the wherewithal to return home and when his scoutmaster upbraided him for his rash act he

simply stood by, innocent looking and smiling. No matter what else was said of Spiffy in those days, no one could do other than admit the power of his smile. And never was he lacking in respect to his elders.

"That's one scout rule you never break," said the scoutmaster. "You never fail to be courteous and you never fail to smile. I wish you obeyed the other laws as well. You'd make an A-1 scout, Arnold."

"I don't want to be an A-1 scout," Spiffy returned frankly. "I don't want to be a scout at all—I never wanted to be one but my father made me. I'll never do things I'm made to do because I don't like rules. And that's all the scouts have—*rules!*"

The scoutmaster frowned. "That's nonsense, Arnold. Even a baby must obey some law—where would the world be without laws? We'd be like a lot of savages."

"I'd like to be a savage," Spiffy said wilfully, "then my father couldn't make me go home when I didn't want to go."

"I thought you didn't like the scouts?" asked the scoutmaster.

"I don't, but it's better than going home to Jersey City and having my father lecture me every day for a week or more," he admitted. "Gee, the scouts are better than that."

The scoutmaster smiled patiently. "It's comforting to hear you admit that much, Arnold. I'm afraid you've never been honest with yourself about scouting—you've never so much as *tried* to understand us. Perhaps some day you will, eh?"

"I will when they stop having rules," smiled Spiffy.

"You will when you learn to respect rules as you do your parents," the man prompted him.

"Parents are like the scouts," Spiffy insisted. "Mine are anyway. They're always making me do things I don't want to do."

The scoutmaster shook his head hopelessly. "You've a lot to learn, Arnold, but that is neither here nor there just now. Pack up your things. I'm going to buy your ticket and see

you safely on the train for Jersey City."

Spiffy turned obediently and went straight to his patrol cabin. He whistled merrily and packed his bag and when a member of his patrol asked him where he was going, he winked mischievously.

CHAPTER II

COMMON SENSE

"Are you sorry that you're leaving us?" asked the scoutmaster as they walked around on the platform waiting for the train to come in.

"Nope," smiled Spiffy, "I'm never sorry for anything I do. I'm sorry for what other people do to me."

"That's your creed, eh? Well, my boy, perhaps you'll have to do otherwise some day. Here's your train—I wish you luck and plenty of common sense."

Spiffy returned the proffered hand clasp, boarded the waiting train and went merrily on his way. In five minutes he had completely forgotten the best wishes of his scoutmaster and the thought of ever having common sense seemed tragic to him. It made him wonder if he could stand on the bottom step of the rail-

road coach for five minutes without being thrown off.

This idea was quickly dismissed by the appearance of a news butcher who entered his coach bearing a tray full of tempting looking candies. He called the man and bought some imported Swiss milk chocolate, a package of lemon drops and a five cent bag of salted peanuts. Also he inquired as to whether or not the business of the news butcher was a lucrative one.

Having received an affirmative answer he made a wager with the man that he could carry the tray the length of the train and sell more goods than he did.

"I'll go you one," laughed the news butcher, who was richly endowed with sporting blood. "If you can make a good showing I'll give you what you ask for—providin' it's reasonable."

Spiffy immediately took him up and started through the train, the tray adorning his khaki-clad figure quite imposingly. He cried his wares appealingly and looked pensively into the faces of the fair sex, both young and old.

"Help a scout who is earning his way home, lady?" he pleaded. "Buy a bar of chocolate or some lemon drops and you'll be helping me."

It was a hard hearted traveler who could resist the naive, Arnold Henshaw, alias Spiffy. Few did resist him and before the train entered Jersey City he handed the news butcher an empty tray. He had won his wager.

"Will a dollar do?" asked the genial news butcher.

"Sure," answered Spiffy. "That ain't bad for a half hour's work. Gee, it was easy—I'm going to be a news butcher too after I quit school."

Spiffy left the train at Weehawken and took a bus to the Erie Railroad Station at Jersey City. There he bought a ticket for Bridgeboro and after an hour's wait was embarked once more upon another adventure.

The spotless looking town of Bridgeboro made quite a favorable impression upon him and after he had roamed its streets for a delightful hour he decided to call upon his aunt and uncle who lived up in the suburb of North

Bridgeboro. It was his first visit there as his uncle was not kindly looked upon in the Henshaw family. His aunt Kate was pitied because of her marriage to a ne'er do well and while she had often visited Jersey City, Spiffy had never been allowed to mention his Uncle William Riker or to ask the privilege of visiting that household.

"I'll see what my uncle's like," he said aloud as he waited for a bus to take him uptown. "I'm just going to find out because Ma and Pop told me never to go. I want to see why they don't like him."

Spiffy was not long in finding out for in ten minutes he alighted from the bus in front of his aunt's humble looking cottage. He walked up the path between rows of overgrown weeds and as he stepped upon the porch he noticed that it was badly in need of repair.

His Aunt Kate opened the door and admitted him with a pained expression upon her tired, careworn features. Once inside, however, she put her arms around him and smiled affectionately. "I'm put out about you coming here,"

she said in hushed tones. "Your father and mother will be angry, Arnold."

"I know," he admitted indifferently, "but ain't you glad to see me, Aunt Kate?"

"Course I am, silly," she said, glancing uneasily toward the stairs. "Your uncle's upstairs, asleep. I don't know how he's likely to treat you—he has a chip on his shoulder on account of the way your Ma and Pop won't recognize him."

"Well, that ain't my fault, is it?" Spiffy asked. "I never did nothing to him. . . ."

"Is that your nephew Arnold?" asked a wheezy voice from the stairway.

They looked up to see the tall, spare frame of Mr. Riker bending over the worn balustrade. "You heard me!" he shouted to his startled wife. "Don't stand there as if you was dead!"

"Yeh, it's him, Bill," she said, as if in a trance.

"Sure, it's me," Spiffy spoke up. "I came because I met a dandy scout feller by the name of Tom Slade and he works for a man named Temple and he owns a big scout camp in the

Catskills. I bet it's a better scout camp than the one I just got put out of."

"*Put out!*" said his aunt, horrified.

"Sure," said Spiffy boastfully. "Not many scouts can say that. Gee, they were glad to get rid of me and believe me, I was glad to get rid of them."

"It serves your mother and father right," said Mr. Riker still depending on the flimsy balustrade for support. "You wouldn't ketch me lettin' any youngster o' mine wastin' his time like that. Yuh wouldn't git the chance to go in the first place. They're a no good bunch!"

Spiffy looked up at his uncle, wonderingly. This was a different person he was encountering. Everyone that had any interest in him at all had continually urged him to be a good scout and here his uncle was denouncing them the same as he had been doing. He wasn't quite sure that he liked to hear it.

"Aw, they ain't so bad," he said with all trace of bravado gone. "Gee, I did a lot of things to them and all I got was to be put in

the kitchen to wash dishes and peel potatoes. They ought to 've given me a good sock for the way I treated them and the way I broke rules."

"Yeh, that's just it," said Mr. Riker shuffling downstairs and into the living room. "They handle boys like they were made of silk instead o' makin' them rustle aroun' and work and givin' them a good beatin' once in a while."

"Well, it's good you're not the scouts," said Spiffy bravely, "that's all I've got to say! I was the only one that made any trouble up there and gee whiz, there's hundreds of guys in that camp so that doesn't prove it hurts scouts to be treated like they were silk, does it?"

Mr. Riker glared at his nephew and seated himself in a large, worn rocker. "I got no use for anything that gives boys time to do mischief. I had to work hard when I was a boy and now. . . ."

"You let Aunt Kate do it," Spiffy interposed with a smile.

Mrs. Riker put out a detaining hand, for her

husband leaned forward in his amazement. "Well, you impudent pup, you," he said to Spiffy. "What's it your business if your Aunt Kate does work a little bit to help me out! I ain't a well man, but I'd learn yuh to hold your tongue if you was under this roof."

Mrs. Riker smiled feebly. "There now, Bill," she said, trying to bring about a truce, "I'm sure Arnold didn't mean to be impudent —he just repeated what he hears at home most likely."

Mr. Riker scowled, got up from the chair and sought seclusion upstairs once more. "I'd learn him different if he was here," he mumbled angrily as he left the top step. "I'd take some of it out o' him."

"I bet he would," Spiffy said when his uncle was well out of earshot. "Gee, he's a bear, ain't he Aunt Kate?"

"Hush, Arnold," said the patient woman, "don't let him hear you. He's always ready to pick everything up."

"Gee, I wouldn't want to live with him," Spiffy admitted frankly. "If I had a father

like that—gee, I just now realized that Pop ain't half bad. He lets me do everything. Gee, I guess I'll go right back home and apologize."

"I'm glad to hear you say that, Arnold," said his aunt. "You've given your father a lot of worry with your pranks and he's a good man. He's trying hard every day to earn a lot of money so's you can have a good education and grow up to be a fine young man. And your mother too, think how she worries."

Spiffy was all contrition. "Come on home with me, too," he urged her. "Tell them how I said I was sorry—otherwise they'll think I'm joking again."

Mrs. Riker went over and hugged him. "I will, Arnold," she said, sweetly. "I will, because at last you seem to have sense."

CHAPTER III

RESOLVED

Spiffy strolled out around the back of the Riker cottage while he was waiting for his aunt to dress. This shabby home stood at the top of the hill on a little knoll of rocky ground and down below the river wound its way between grassy banks and sweet-smelling woods.

"I'd like to live here on account of the river," he said enviously gazing at the placid looking stream. "Boy, I sure would swim—night and day."

"Not if your Uncle Bill had anything to do with it," said Mrs. Riker emerging from the cottage, dressed for the little journey. "I'm afraid the river wouldn't do you much good as long as he was around. It ain't done me a bit o' good, I know that. And how I could swim when I was a young girl."

Spiffy looked at her pityingly and made a

solemn resolution that he was going to be better to her and to everyone. The world had been kind to him and he had done nothing in return and in this frame of mind he walked lightly out to the road, helping his aunt over all the rough places.

"That's a scout rule—to be chivalrous," he told her. "Funny that when I was a scout I never thought about it and now that I've been put out I start living up to it."

"You haven't been put out exactly, have you, Arnold?" Mrs. Riker asked anxiously.

"Maybe not," he answered. "But I'd have a nerve to go back now after all I did."

"Oh, they ain't that kind to hold it against you if they see you're sorry," she said.

"I know it," he admitted, "but I'm—aw, I'm ashamed now."

"Well, that ain't a bad sign," she said, pleased. It was indeed a delight to her to see her favorite nephew so penitent and humble.

And Spiffy *was* humbled. The transformation had been so swift that he was himself amazed and he wondered all the way back to

Jersey City whether Tom Slade had caused the change or whether it was his uncle's denunciation of the scouts that set off the spark of his slumbering loyalty. At any rate, he pressed his face against the dusty windowpane of the old railroad coach and silently planned how he was going to win his way back into the scouts upon his own merits."

"I'll start first by being kind to Mom and Pop," he resolved in a half-whisper.

"What did you say, Arnold?" asked his aunt who just caught his lips moving.

He told her. "They won't be so pleased to hear that I was just kicked out but when they know I got some sense on account of it, they'll be glad."

He walked expectantly beside his aunt all the way up the tree shaded street and poured forth upon her listening ears, the virtues that he hoped to live up to during the rest of his natural life. It was all very new and exhilarating to him.

The Henshaw home was located in the center of the block and as they approached it, they

noticed a small group of women standing on its porch, talking and seemingly agitated. Mrs. Riker hurried a few steps and Spiffy ran ahead.

When the ladies espied Spiffy they ceased talking instantly and each one looked at him with grim and troubled features. Mrs. Riker was aware of this and mounted the porch steps with pounding heart. Was this an evil sign of her nephew's home-coming or was . . .

"I'm awfully glad your Aunt Kate's with you," spoke one of the ladies to the wondering boy. "I'm glad because—well, oh . . ."

"I'll tell him and Mrs. Riker," interposed another neighbor. "I—oh, it's hard to begin."

"What is it?" Mrs. Riker demanded. "What's the matter?"

At that juncture, a big burly policeman came out of the Henshaw's front door and surveyed the tense group. Mrs. Riker saw the look of appeal that the ladies gave him and her heart seemed to forsake her. She knew then that some terrible thing had invaded that home.

"This is the Henshaw boy, officer," an

elderly lady said. "This is his aunt too—Mrs. Henshaw's sister. You—you better tell them."

The officer nodded and a look of pain crossed his genial looking features. "Someone's got to do it," he said quietly, "so it might as well be me." He tried to smile at Spiffy and his aunt—a smile that told much.

Mrs. Riker spared him further, however. She nodded slowly and set her mouth as if to get ready for the threatening pain. "We're ready, officer," she said bravely. "Arnold and me."

"It's Mr. and Mrs. Henshaw, ma'am," the man said dully. "They've just been killed in their car. A truck ran into 'em down the street and did for 'em. They're a-waitin' identification. Youse better go down."

Spiffy never got over that shock exactly. Time softened it of course, but he always remembered that the world had seemed to slip out from under his feet. And that night when he sat with his aunt in the deserted home he was still too dazed to cry.

"All I can think of is that I didn't get chance

to tell them that I . . . Well, anyhow Aunt Kate, I spose I'll go live with you, huh?"

Mrs. Riker nodded. "I'll be good to you, Arnold," she said softly.

"Yeh, I know it. But Uncle Bill—he don't like the scouts, does he?"

"No, he doesn't like the scouts."

"And I do," said the boy mechanically. "It serves me right that I like them when its too late."

Two years passed.

CHAPTER IV

WHERE CREDIT IS DUE

Spiffy stood outside of his back door contemplating the river in its devious course from the bridge. Particularly was he interested in its flowing path after it left the reedy banks just below his uncle's house.

It was not ten minutes since he had heard gay voices and carefree shouts echoing up the hill, causing him to immediately abandon his wood chopping and join in the shouting. Perhaps he did not abandon himself to the shouting as thoroughly as he had abandoned chopping wood but then he had his uncle to consider. That gentleman was a hard task master and Spiffy had long since learned to keep that knowledge uppermost in his young mind.

Two canoes loaded with scouts had hailed him, urging him to join them on that bright, warm morning. But Spiffy was only able to

shout that Saturday was a busy day for him. He wanted to add that every day was a busy day but the slamming of a door from somewhere in the cottage prevented him.

Unwillingly he turned his back upon the river and upon the scouts and took up the axe. The door opened and someone stepped out of the kitchen. Spiffy did not look up but knew by the shiftless swish of the footfalls that it was his uncle.

"'S 'at you a-hollerin' just before, Arnold?" the man asked in short, wheezy tones.

Spiffy let the axe rise and fall twice before he answered. "Yep," he said, slowly. "Some of the fellers—scouts—were going up the river for all day. They wanted me to come. That's about all."

Bill Riker, as all North Bridgeboro called him, stared lazily at the axe glittering in the sunshine. He turned his head around without moving his tall, spare frame one inch and selected a soap box out of an accumulation of various other boxes standing piled up against the back of the little frame cottage.

"Fetch me that soap box, Arnold!" he rasped at the busy boy. "I'm tired out."

Spiffy laid down his axe and went over. He dragged out the box from under the rest and pushed it toward his uncle. "I'm tired too," he said, surprised at his own temerity. "All yesterday afternoon and since seven o'clock this morning I been chopping up this log. I got pains in my back even."

Bill Riker flopped down onto the box and crossed his long legs. He watched his nephew for a few minutes then shook his head. "I declare you're the laziest kid I ever did see. You ain't got the slightest notion to be grateful for what your aunt and me is doin' for you. Maybe you'd like to be traipsin' around with them good-for-nothin' scouts, eh?"

Spiffy stopped and faced him. "I once said they were good for nothing—I said it when my father and mother was alive and when I was up to a lake with them one summer. They were always nice to me even when I didn't really belong to them. I didn't know what I was talking about that time I guess—I even ran

away and I disobeyed so many rules that they had to let me go back home. Gee, I was an awful sap when I think of it because I had a chance then. Now I haven't any because you and Aunt Kate are too poor to let me join."

Bill Riker disliked any pointed reference to his impecuniousness. He scowled. "Just as if I couldn't afford to let you join if I wanted to," he sneered. "But if I was a good deal richer than I am I wouldn't let you join—they're a lazy lot, they are, and they'd have you as bad as them in no time. You're bad enough now," he added as an afterthought. "You better hurry up with that choppin' 'fore it rains. That wood's got to get down celler 'fore night or your Aunt Kate won't have no fire to cook your meals with. You're glad enough to eat from us, ain't you?"

Spiffy grasped the axe again with trembling fingers. He wondered how any boy could feel grateful to a man like his Uncle Bill. He wondered why relatives gave orphaned nephews a home and then spent the rest of their lives in making them feel miserable about it.

In the midst of these thoughts, his good but timid Aunt Kate opened the back door and looked out rather fearfully. "Bill," she called in frightened tones. "Bill, Mr. Temple's just stopped in front of the house in that grand car of his. I 'spect he's come after the rent."

An uneasy look crossed Bill Riker's face and he stood up. "It's blame easy for him to come pesterin' me for money!" he wheezed and shook his fist in Spiffy's direction. "All he's got to do is to ride up here in a swell car and fill up his pockets and then go give it to them scouts what you want to traipse around with so bad. Yeh, give it to a lot of rascals what has nothin' to do but go up on the river Saturdays and raise Cain. And you want to join 'em, eh? Hmph! Not while I got my senses you won't."

Spiffy could see nothing but his aunt's work worn fingers tremulously holding the door open. His eyes blazed with anger. "Anyhow, they've been nice to me, the scouts have. I never forget when people are nice to me, even Mr. Temple," he said bravely.

Bill Riker wheeled around as if to strike the boy. "Please!" his wife pleaded from the doorway. "Mr. Temple's here, Bill. He's a-knockin' on the front door now."

The mist of righteous indignation that blurred Spiffy's vision did not clear away until long after the door closed behind his uncle. He threw his axe to the ground and walked a few feet, then stopped.

The voices of the shouting scouts had died away but the trail of the canoes was still visible in the sparkling water. Spiffy followed it with his shining black eyes and smiled. He could almost feel what it was like to be with them—just by looking and thinking.

"Anyway," he said aloud, "the scouts saved me a good biff just then. Uncle Bill would have let one go at me if it hadn't been for Mr. Temple that time. And Mr. Temple's the scouts so I might as well give the credit to them."

CHAPTER V

AN ERRAND

The day continued warm—too warm almost for early June—and toward mid-afternoon the sun took on a lead-colored hue. The still air became oppressive and Spiffy stopped for a moment to mop his perspiring face.

His aunt Kate, watching him from the kitchen window, shook her head pityingly and hurried out to him. "Arnold," she said softly, "I ain't a-goin' to let you slave at that any longer. It's a burnin' shame, that's what it is, to make a boy your age do such hard work the whole live-long day. And such a day!"

Spiffy turned his head away and looked toward Bridgeboro. Like a great mist the humidity was rising out of the valley and slowly up the hill to them. He pointed to it. "You can see for yourself, Aunt Kate," he said wearily. "It does look as if it were going to

rain before night, just like Uncle Bill said."

"I don't care what your Uncle Bill said," she whispered. "You've got enough chopped to last us for a week or more and if the rest of it gets wet it can dry out 'fore then, can't it? 'Nother thing, Arnold, I'm gettin' right tired of your uncle making out he's always tired so that he don't have to work. I have to work and you have to work and go to school too and even now he's inside sleeping away because he says he can't stand the heat!

"Just as if any of us can stand it when it comes to that! But the difference between him and you and me is that *we have* to stand it!" She reached in her dress pocket and pulled out a coin and offered it to the boy. "Here, take this and see a movie, Arnold. You'll cool off for a change as well as *him!*"

Spiffy could not keep the tears back. There had been very few movie shows that he had attended since his parents died. He knew his aunt worked hard with her sewing and that every penny counted while his uncle would not work. It was hard to refuse the money but he

shook his head. "You'll have to do without something else if you give it to me," he said. " 'Nother thing, what about Mr. Temple and the rent?"

"You can imagine, Arnold," she answered. "He's always so nice about it, Mr. Temple is, but your uncle has tried him to the limit—it's four months or more he owes and Mr. Temple said he'll have to take steps or somethin' like that."

"Does that mean we'll be put out?"

Mrs. Riker nodded. "But don't worry, Arnold. I think he knows *we* have nothin' to do with it. He heard you choppin', Mr. Temple did, and he looked out at you and said to me what a fine, ambitious boy you were, workin' so hard on such a terrible day.

"I guess your uncle took the hint because after Mr. Temple went he started goin' on about rich men and such. Anyway, he got himself so worked up he had to take a nap. A queer man, Mr. Riker is," she said musingly. "He ain't got no use for folks what he owes money to."

Spiffy leaned up against the cottage in sheer fatigue. His face looked worn and white. "Maybe I could go and speak to Mr. Temple so he wouldn't put us out," he said thoughtfully. "Maybe I could ask him to let me do some work so's we could pay him that way."

"And encourage your uncle in more laziness?" she asked him. "You'll do nothin' o' the kind, Arnold. Just run along now and get out o' sight before *he* wakes up. I want to have a talk with him when you're not around, anyway. I'll tell him I sent you on an errand to Bridgeboro 'cause I was too tired to go."

The movies would have been incentive enough for any boy and it is not to be denied that Spiffy was moved by so tempting an offer. But he had something else in mind. His plans concerned the immediate present and he felt sure that if they worked out everything else would too.

He smiled gratefully at the woman who had tried to make up for his uncle's treatment of him. Never once had she ever thrown up to him what she was doing so that he might sleep

and eat after a fashion. It all flashed across his mind as he saw her outstretched hand with the quarter offered to him. He took it, humbly.

"Maybe I won't have to use it, Aunt Kate," he said mysteriously. "I'll only take it in case it storms and I have to ride home on the bus. Anyway, I'm not going to the movies—that's settled. I got to find out somethin' in Bridgeboro and I won't have time maybe."

Mrs. Riker shook her head. "Don't be foolish, Arnold," she said in a tone of warning. "If you're thinking about Mr. Temple—*please don't!* Your uncle won't never work if he finds it out and it'll make me . . ."

"Not that I say I'm going to Mr. Temple's," Spiffy interposed, "but do you say it wouldn't help you if I spoke to him and told him how Uncle Bill treats us and how he won't work and all?"

Mrs. Riker conceded that it would. "If you just went and said that, it would be all right, Arnold," she said. "He'd know then that you and I were honest and that we wasn't upholdin'

your uncle in makin' him wait for his money."

"That's what I mean," said Spiffy.

At that juncture a sound, like the falling of some heavy object inside the cottage, made itself heard to them. Plainly startled, Mrs. Riker pushed Spiffy around the side of the tiny building and out of sight of any windows. "Run, Arnold," she said timorously, "it's *him,* I bet, like as not. Get out o' sight, quick as you can!"

Spiffy lost no time in slinking along through the high weeds surrounding the Riker cottage. It had always annoyed him—this jungle growth, but now he was glad that his uncle had complacently allowed it free rein even up to their very windows. It hid him sufficiently until he reached the road.

When he emerged onto the hot pavement a small, ramshackle Ford drew up and stopped not two feet from him. Its lone occupant spied him instantly and hailed him in gruff, impatient tones. "Say, your uncle in?" he snapped, getting out a small black book.

Spiffy nodded.

"He better be!" the man said. "What's he think I am, anyway?"

Spiffy shrugged his shoulders and ran pell-mell down the road. He knew from past experiences who the man was and the nature of his business at the Riker cottage. He was just another collector, a little more impatient than the rest.

Spiffy breathed more freely when he rounded the curve of the highway into lower North Bridgeboro. No longer could he see his uncle's house standing almost precariously on that ridiculous little knoll. It often seemed to him that he lived on two hills really. Certainly they got the full benefit of the elements there, without shade or protection of any kind.

And so when he came within the city limits and on to the sidewalks he slowed down a little, thankful to feel the shade-cooled flagging under his worn soles. The river too seemed to send a little breeze just at that point. He hated leaving it for the hot unshaded spaces of Main Street.

For a moment he stopped and wondered what new argument his uncle would give the gruff collector. Then his eyes strayed toward the river. The tide was on the ebb and several rowboats were on their way downstream. Familiar voices again echoed in the still, humid air. Spiffy peered through the trees and made out the two scout canoes being swiftly paddled on their homeward way. It gave him the loneliest feeling that he had ever experienced in his life and he turned away from the scene with a little ache in his heart.

In the distant east some thunder rumbled ominously. He looked up to see a great mass of black clouds moving toward the sun.

CHAPTER VI

THE STORM

He had not gone more than two blocks when the world seemed suddenly in the grip of a portentous calm. The black storm clouds had merged into one vast heavenly pall that threatened the silent earth.

Spiffy shrunk inwardly from the fearful scene and wished that he had stayed at home until the storm was over. A little nervous quiver ran down his spine whenever he thought of the freshly chopped wood that his uncle would have to carry "down cellar." He dreaded the scene that such a procedure would bring about when he got back.

He did not have much time to linger on such terrifying thoughts, however. A great gust of wind whirled him roughly against a tree but luckily did no more than scare him out of his wits. Ear-splitting thunder crashed right

above his head and in its wake flashed a blinding streak of lightning.

Spiffy had been endowed with a good deal of moral courage by his Creator but never before had it been put to such a test. He was stunned by the suddenness of his impact with the tree and it was some few seconds before he was able to think clearly.

The vast pall was swiftly moving toward upper North Bridgeboro, he judged. It seemed to be gathering itself into a great ball almost the shape of a huge balloon. He had never seen anything like it before and when another onslaught of wind accompanied by a slash of rain struck him full in the face he decided that the bravest thing to do was to run.

With difficulty he managed to keep himself balanced in the driving wind and rain and took to the middle of the street for safety. Heavy branches were blowing down onto the sidewalks like wisps of moss. Just after he passed the huge elm in front of the Stanton mansion it bent under the fury of the wind and was borne to the street like a piece of cardboard. Spiffy

heard a sputter and noticed that it had taken the high tension wires in its downward course.

He looked cautiously after that to left and right and sped along as fast as it was possible. No living being could he see in the length or breadth of Main Street. Everyone but himself seemed safely sheltered from that wanton wind and rain.

He reached the beautiful Temple Mansion, dripping with water, and as he ran up the long, flower-bordered foot-path the storm ceased as quickly as it had begun. Spiffy smiled ironically. "That's just my luck," he said half-aloud. "As if my clothes didn't look bad enough *dry,* comin' into this swell dump!"

But he made up his mind that he wouldn't turn back then. He had plans and he meant to carry them out despite his forlorn appearance. And what he had learned of Mr. Temple's "charity toward all" attitude was sufficient to give him the courage to carry on in the face of everything.

Quite bravely then did he stuff his drenched knicker cuffs more securely in under his hose.

Better to let them drip down his legs and into his shoes than to spoil the high polish on Mr. Temple's floor. He slicked back his tightly waved hair with two sweeps of his thin, calloused hands and strode up to the high, imposing door. Then he rang the bell with a long, determined ring.

A little thin Japanese butler opened the door and seemed not at all surprised at the unusual appearance of the caller. Instead he smiled suavely and bowed quite low. Spiffy felt encouraged.

"Mr. Temple in?" he asked timidly.

The butler smiled more brightly than ever. "I tink not—but maybe so," he said. "Come in. I shall see very soon."

Spiffy hesitated. "Gee, I'm pretty wet, mister," he said lingering on the threshold. "I might get the place all mussed up."

The butler smiled amusedly. "It is not-ting, young man. Come in!"

Spiffy stepped in and the door closed behind him. The butler left him and soon disappeared through a swinging door at the end of a

long hall. There was a distant medley of voices and presently the door swung open again admitting a large, round-faced woman.

It was Mrs. Pearson, Mr. Temple's trusted housekeeper, and Spiffy had long known her through his aunt. Mrs. Riker had occasionally done sewing for the genial soul and she had often visited the humble cottage that the boy called home.

Mrs. Pearson threw up her chubby arms above her head in a gesture of surprise when she saw him. "Land sakes alive, Arnold Henshaw!" she exclaimed in her soft, kindly way. "What in all creation are you doing out in such weather?"

Spiffy smiled to cover his embarrassment. "I started out when it wasn't such weather," he answered frankly. "Gee, I never thought it was going to be so bad."

Mrs. Pearson smiled sympathetically. "It's good you weren't hurt, anyway," she said. "You're lucky because they called Mr. Temple from up near your way I guess it was, and they told him to come right up and see what dam-

age the storm did to his property. So that's where he's gone, Arnold. I 'spect he won't be back for a while."

"Did whoever call say where the damage was?" Spiffy asked, startled. "Do you think it could o' been Aunt Kate's or anything?"

"Shucks, don't get excited!" Mrs. Pearson answered. "I don't think anything of the kind. Whoever called was one of that kind that loses their head, I guess. Ten chances to one Mr. Temple had his trouble for nothing already. The storm was terrible bad, I guess, but not enough to take him on a fool's errand up there. Anyway, what did you want of him, Arnold?"

Spiffy rested his right foot over his left. He felt decidedly uncomfortable. "I—I—came on account of I wanted to speak to him about the rent," he stammered. "On account of Uncle Bill."

"Is that good-for-nothing loafer still out of work?" she asked incredulously. "Do you mean to tell me you've had to come to plead for him?"

"Well, I—I thought maybe for Aunt Kate's

sake he could let me work or something," Spiffy answered. "I thought that would make it all right."

A maternally anxious look came into Mrs. Pearson's misty eyes. "You poor boy," she said soothingly. "Come on into the kitchen and dry your wet feet and clothes!" Then: "I'd just like the chance to tell Bill Riker what I think of him now! It's little enough that he's done for you and your poor aunt but he's made you work and now he'd see you do more!"

The good woman led the boy down the long, dim hall and through the swinging door. A rush of sweet, warm air greeted him as he stepped into the big kitchen. From the gas range emanated that delicious smell of baking cake. Spiffy sniffed the air hungrily.

"Smell good, Arnold?" Mrs. Pearson smiled. "Take a chair and get up close to the oven. Put your shoes on the warming shelf—they'll dry without burning."

Spiffy did as he was told and was grateful for Mrs. Pearson's motherly attentions. She busied herself with odd tasks that were con-

cerned with Saturday baking and the butler passed noiselessly to and from the kitchen through another swinging door on the other side of the house.

Once when he was carrying a tray full of silverware from the kitchen he braced himself against the door long enough to give Spiffy a peek into the Temple dining-room. An austere looking buffet gleaming with a gold and silver service gave the orphaned boy a delicious insight into the lives of those whom he had always read and heard about. He determined to keep his eye on that door in order to get another look at such a royal display of wealth.

Mrs. Pearson turned to him from her tasks. "What are you thinking about, Arnold?" she asked, aware of his thoughtfulness.

"I was thinking about that silver and gold stuff in that room, there," he answered pointing toward the door. "I was thinking how nice it must be to have things like that and not have to worry about rent or anything. Gee, you'd think Mr. Temple would be afraid to leave it around on account of burglars."

Mrs. Pearson laughed. "Mr. Temple ain't afraid of burglars, Arnold," she said. "He always says that he's been charitable to all the burglars in Bridgeboro and now they don't have to steal any more. No one would think of stealing from Mr. Temple—he's too kind!"

Spiffy kept his eyes on the door. "Gee, I bet that stuff's worth a lot of money. I bet if a feller was hard up so that he was starving or something I bet he'd forget how kind Mr. Temple was," he said musingly.

"They'd have to be mighty ungrateful if they did," Mrs. Pearson said loyally. "I can't imagine anybody doing a mean thing to that man, no, I can't."

The butler came out once more and Spiffy got a longer, better look. He was captivated. "Ain't no one home here but you and *him?*" he asked her.

"You mean the butler?" she asked.

Spiffy nodded.

"Mrs. Temple and Mary are gone for the summer and the cook's away on her vacation," explained Mrs. Pearson. "There's just the

butler and me looking out for Mr. Temple and he's away half the time too. Why did you want to know, Arnold?"

"Aw, I don't know," Spiffy answered. "It's such a big house with only a few people and I never been inside a place like this before so I guess I get to thinking about burglars all the time just because Mr. Temple's so rich."

Mrs. Pearson laughed. "You always were a queer little duck. I've told your Aunt Kate that many's the time."

The fire siren screeched boldly into their conversation and cut it short. Mrs. Pearson stopped her work and audibly counted the shrieks one by one. "It's forty-two," she said at the first pause. "That's right up at the limits. S'pose we got the storm to thank for that."

"Lightning, I bet," said Spiffy, feeling the comfort of his drying clothes.

"Maybe," Mrs. Pearson said.

The siren kept up its horrible din and presently the agile little butler came running into the kitchen, waving his hands excitedly.

CHAPTER VII

DUTY

"WHAT's the matter, Kato?" she asked.

"Gardener just tell me up there there's fire from storm!" he panted breathlessly. "Terrible fire!"

Mrs. Pearson smiled. "Kato does love a good fire," she told Spiffy. "And the fun of it is he likes me to enjoy it with him. We'll go out in the back yard and see if we can see any of it. Want to come, Arnold?"

Spiffy stood up and felt his shoes. "They're not dry," he announced. "But you go ahead because I like it in here—it's so nice I don't mind not seeing one fire."

"That's good," Mrs. Pearson said, taking off her apron. "It's pretty wet out there still so I guess it's just as well that you don't try getting your feet wet too often." She hurried out

close on Kato's heels, the screen door slamming noisily behind her.

Spiffy turned at that moment and noticed that the swinging door into the hall swung along with the draught and seemed to stick there. He pushed back the chair he had been sitting on and went over to it and saw that the front hall door was also standing open.

His first impulse was to go and shut it but the thought occurred to him that perhaps Kato had left it that way purposely and that he better let it alone. In point of fact, he felt too awed by the solemn grandeur of that fine old home to tread its stately halls in his stocking feet. Instead he pulled the door to in the kitchen and padded his way to the window where he could watch Mrs. Pearson and Kato.

He saw them hurrying toward the river bank with the gardener and as the trees were in full bloom and the land sloping gradually it was only a few moments before they were out of his sight. He called after Mrs. Pearson and told her to let him know how bad it was and she answered him cheerfully.

Spiffy felt singularly happy. He walked around and around the kitchen drinking in its clean, wholesome atmosphere. Everything was so spic—he wished heartily that his Aunt Kate could have things one half as nice. It must be nice not to have to worry about wood being chopped so that one may have the fuel to cook with. Gas was an unknown luxury in the Riker cottage.

As he made his seventh round he stopped near the dining-room door—near enough to push it open. He looked longingly at the wide mahogany panels that stood between him and that wondrous room and wondered if he might just take another peek at the gold and silver. But Spiffy was nothing if not thoroughly honest and he remembered that Mrs. Pearson had made no offer to let him look while she was there. Consequently he told himself that it would be sneaking to do it now and with firm resolve he shuffled his way back to the window, whistling a tune.

As he stood there idly waiting, one of the doors creaked eerily behind him. He did not

bother turning but told himself it was the wind. The door creaked again and he roused himself out of his comfortable reverie in time to see that it was the dining-room door closing ever so slowly—almost too slowly to be caused by a mere gust of wind.

The fact struck him forcibly and he walked across the floor. He stopped mid-way and laughed. "Gee, I'm crazy—seeing things or somethin', I guess. Anyhow, I got no business going in there and I bet it was something in me that shouldn't be there telling me I should go in because it wasn't the wind when all the time I knew it was. That's what Aunt Kate calls an evil spirit and I bet anything it was."

As he got to the window again he saw Kato running up from the river, obviously under the stress of great excitement. Coming nearer, Spiffy could see that he was frantically trying to make him hear.

The boy stepped quickly to the screen door and out onto the back porch. Kato spied him and shouted, "M's Pearson, she say you should

come. Terrible fire up by hill and she tink it where you live. She want you to come down with us and see."

Spiffy stood like one in a trance and nodded his head mechanically. Kato interpreted it as an assent and, being very much interested in the march of events, turned quickly and ran back. He could not know what an announcement of that kind meant to the orphaned boy —his chief interest was in the glow and intensity of the fire, not what kindled it.

But Spiffy knew only too well. He knew that a disaster of that kind would blight his aunt's life—she had endured too much already. "Funny how I'm always thinking what things mean to her," he said aloud as he ran to the stove and got his shoes. "Anyhow, she's been the one that's helped me and never told me about it either," he added defiantly.

For a moment he stopped, thinking of Kato's message. Then he shrugged his shoulders. "Anyhow," he said, "if the fire's up on the hill I belong up on the hill. There's no use of me going down to see first—gee whiz! And any-

how, if Aunt Kate's afraid or anything I got to be there—she's been good to me."

Blindly he ran out the back way and around out to Main Street. One picture he held firmly in his mind and as he waited for a bus or a chance lift it seemed to stand out as clear as crystal. It was the memory of his aunt standing before him with the quarter held tremblingly in her weary hand.

Spiffy, that deserter of scouts, as Tom Slade had once called him, had changed considerably. He had thought himself worthy when he was entirely unworthy. Loyalty and gratitude were entirely foreign to his active mind. But happily, Fate (or whatever you wish to call that mistress of our fortunes and misfortunes) had taught him those very virtues in that hard school of poverty. And now that he had proven himself worthy he was blissfully unaware of it.

Certainly Spiffy mended every scout law that he had broken.

CHAPTER VIII

A SORT OF SCOUT

WHO shall say what Spiffy's feelings were on that memorable day as a kindly driver raced him homeward? The man had told him of the disaster that laid waste almost the entire section of upper North Bridgeboro. He told to the fearful boy of the terrific cyclone that had leaped out of the black skies and crushed everything in its path—houses, trees and people.

"I heard down Main Street," said the man, "that people living on the hill were blown right down into the river. Just think of that—*in the river!*"

Spiffy sat mute. He had only one thought —that of his aunt. But, on the other hand, it did not seem conceivable that any such disaster would harm her like that. He had been orphaned once—it just wasn't possible again.

And so Spiffy reached upper North Bridgeboro fearful that he no longer had a home but optimistic as to his aunt's safety. Even as they drove around the bend and came face to face with the appalling scene of desolation everywhere he would not give up hope.

Someone's roof was leisurely floating down the river and household furnishings cluttered up the road and neighboring fields. Wearing apparel dangled from the limbs of trees as if it had been hung there. Then Spiffy looked up toward the little knoll knowing that what he wished for wouldn't be there.

It wasn't and he winced for a moment. "It's gone," he said spiritlessly to the man at the wheel."

"Gosh, that's tough luck!" the man said sympathetically and stepped on the gas. "What are you going to do, huh?"

Spiffy stared at him as if in a trance. "Just let me out there—I'll find my Aunt Kate among those people. Gee, there's so many you can't tell who's there," he mumbled hopefully.

There was line after line of fire hose and

the engines were busy moving from one ruin to the other making sure that nothing was smoldering. People stood about in dazed silence, utterly incapable of thinking what they were going to do. Also there was the usual crowd of onlookers and before the man was able to get Spiffy in front of his home they were stopped by the police.

The boy got out of the flivver and thanked the man, leaving him to talk to the police. He saw from where he was standing that nothing was left of the Riker cottage except the props that had held up the front porch. There wasn't a sign of his aunt or uncle anywhere around the ruined place so he started for the crowds that were assembled in the fields.

In and out among the people he went eagerly searching each face and listening for the voice that he so wanted to hear. He went the full length of one field and spied some neighbors of his aunt. Almost joyfully he ran up to them and asked them the question that trembled on his lips but they just stared in answer as if to

say they knew nothing but that they themselves were safe.

Spiffy left them and sought the crowd on the other side of the road. A few gave him an answering glance of great sympathy but it only tended to lower his spirits the more. And in this aimless, hopeful, fearful fashion he wandered around until the little pink glow in the west became a purple streak.

No one paid the least attention to the stunned boy. The survivors were too interested in salvaging what was left of their personal and household effects to be concerned with his futile search. He felt utterly alone.

Without giving much thought to his wanderings he trudged up the hill and to the knoll. The weeds had been trampled down and as he reached the crumbled foundation wall that had once supported his home he felt his eyes smarting with tears. The cellar was flooded with water and little familiar things that he had associated with his aunt were now floating upon its surface.

With a shudder he wondered if she was buried under any of those things. In the fullness of his emotion he was able to think kindly of his uncle also and entirely forgot the mean, petty acts and lazy traits that he had so long despised in him.

He stared down and gradually he became aware of a bit of khaki bobbing its way around in the water. It was his scout suit—the suit that he wore when he wasn't fit to be a scout. He had long outgrown it and it had been hanging for a couple of years on a peg in the attic.

There was something prophetic in its coming to that ignominious end. With one sweep it had been buried with the past and in a sense Spiffy felt exhilarated by the thought that if he ever joined the scouts again it would be in a suit that had no past. The knowledge kept him from sobbing aloud.

He turned and watched the river flowing easily below as if nothing had happened to change the hearts or minds of humanity. Everything went on, he realized—went along the same as before. Nothing waited for him

or cared, not even the river. He shuddered at that thought—it made him wonder if the ebb tide could reveal the secret of his aunt and uncle.

He shuffled listlessly back to where the props were standing. He sat down on one and hunching his knees up under his chin, clasped his hands tightly around them. Then he poked his nose through the little gap in the leg of his knickers and let the tears fall as they would.

He abandoned himself to this for five minutes or more and didn't look up until he felt utterly exhausted. He was glad it was over—he knew that it wouldn't happen again for a long while, perhaps never. But he felt certain that the world had turned its back on him entirely.

He did not see Warde Hollister trudging up from the river bank and hastening toward him. He saw nothing but a leaden colored sky and great piles of ruined homes. Suddenly the cheery voice called from behind.

"I've been looking all over for you, Spiff!" Warde said feelingly. "Jiminy, I'm glad I found you!"

Spiffy jumped down from the prop and faced Warde with red-rimmed eyes. He tried to smile but his heart seemed to break in his throat. "I—I—been looking around for my aunt and uncle," he said in a quivering tone. "I—I can't seem to find out anything and I was down in Mr. Temple's . . ."

"I know all about it, Spiff, old kid," Warde interposed kindly. "We've got all the dope—*we* meaning the Silver Foxes of our own First Bridgeboro Troop. Anyhow, we're all on the job to see what we can do—even Kid Harris himself. He can't do much but shout orders but he kids himself he's the whole works just the same. It was a pretty mean trick that cyclone played on you, Spiff——"

"You said it," Spiffy answered mechanically. "Have you heard anything about my aunt and uncle?" he repeated.

Warde shook his head slowly, unwillingly. "I just asked a cop down there, Spiff," he said. "They all knew your uncle, you know."

Spiff nodded sadly.

"I mean they were all used to seeing him

around town and all,'' Warde said apologetically. ''Anyway, the cops said that one of your neighbors told him that she saw your uncle out in the back yard a few minutes before the crash came. No one seems to know anything more than that. I asked the minute I spied you sitting up here alone. I knew you hadn't found out yet.''

''I guess then they were blown into the river like that man told me,'' Spiffy said in measured tones. ''He said there were lots of them.''

Warde was filled with pity for the poor, unfortunate boy. ''Gee, I know, Spiff,'' he said striving to say the suitable thing. ''It certainly is awful but gee, if you could only feel that way—my mother says sometimes things like this happen for the best. Your aunt worked hard and all, didn't she?''

Spiffy was too choked to speak.

''Come on,'' said Warde trying to smile. ''Maybe you'll like my mother—maybe it won't seem so bad after tonight.''

Spiffy gazed at him questioningly.

Warde nodded. ''Gee whiz, you don't think

we'd let you stay here and starve, do you?" he asked. "No siree, we're dividing up—not only the scouts but everybody in Bridgeboro. And somehow on account of you being a sort of scout—we thought of you right away. I asked first thing if I could have you and my mother says to bring you straight there as soon as I found you."

Spiffy wriggled his toes inside of his wet shoes. He could not talk just then because there was a queer little voice ringing inside of him, repeating over and over that he had once been a sort of a scout.

CHAPTER IX

SCOUT TALK

SPIFFY was carried away from the desolate scene on a vertiable avalanche of scouting hospitality. He wasn't given a chance to think of anything but the immediate present. Roy Blakely saw to that with, of course, Pee-wee's gentle aid.

Ben Maxwell drove them into Bridgeboro just before dusk and the noisy flivver rattled through the street just as carefree and gay as if they were all returning from a picnic. Spiffy sat listening to their talk—to everything as if it were all a dream. Presently Warde gave him a friendly tap on the arm.

"We're home, Spiff," he smiled. "Jiminy, I'm hungry."

"*And how!*" roared Pee-wee.

"You surround me, Kid Harris," Roy said.

"Didn't I see you chewing on a burned potato up there just a little while ago?"

"You're crazy," Pee-wee answered. "That was an orange I found and it had a little mud on it that I wiped off and it was just as good so you must have seen it before the mud got wiped off."

"Exactly," said Roy. "I misunderstand you perfectly."

Spiff found himself smiling as he and Warde reached the sidewalk. They said goodbye to the gang and the flivver leaped forward like a rocking-horse. "Some crowd," said Warde as they walked up onto the porch. "One thing, they've always liked you and been anxious to get you back again."

Spiffy longed to find words for an answer but his mind seemed utterly blank.

Understandingly, Warde rambled on. "Maybe you heard that when you were going to meetings," he said. "But anyhow Mr. Ellsworth, he's our scoutmaster—he likes to keep reminding us of it all the time and now I can

see it's a good thing. He says, once a scout always a scout."

Spiffy gulped. "If I ever join again—that's *if*, I don't want to be the scout I was once. I wouldn't go back into it that way," he seemed to sigh with effort when the words had been spoken.

"Atta boy!" Warde said as he opened the door. "Jiminy, you'll be all right when you feel like that about it—don't worry."

If ever people tried to open up their hearts to a lonely boy, the Hollisters did just that to Spiffy. He was taken in, as it were, from the time he entered the hall until Mrs. Hollister insisted that he better sleep under a light blanket after all his exposure that day.

He was fed royally and bathed so that when the door shut softly behind Mrs. Hollister he was too exhausted and sleepy to wonder about the uncertainties of his existence. And of his aunt he thought very tenderly, particularly of Warde's gentle reminder that she had worked hard. If she was spared that now and could

rest for all time then he was willing that things had happened as they did. Sleep wrested his perplexities from him.

Morning dawned bright and clear and Spiffy descended to the Hollister dining room arrayed in Warde's clothes. Mr. Hollister beamed upon him and winked fraternally. "You and I have a date for a little talk after breakfast," he smiled. "We're going to dope out the whys and wherefores of all your troubles so don't have any fears. Eat your breakfast as if the world owed it to you, Arnold."

"Call him Spiff," said Warde looking up from his grapefruit. "Gee, I think that's a swell nickname. It'd sound dandy in our patrol."

Spiffy smiled and his heart warmed to his benefactor. "I don't care what you call me, Mr. Hollister," he said timidly. "Some fellers called me that when I lived in Jersey City—my mother and father were alive then. I used to like to dress up all the time and I was always buying spiffy looking stick pins and things in

the five and ten. Even after I couldn't dress up and all the name stuck to me."

Mrs. Hollister smiled. "Well, you look spiffy now," she said. "Warde's grown out of a lot of good clothes and I'm very glad that you fit into them so well."

"I bet Arnold would look spiffy in a scout suit—what do you think, Warde?" Mr. Hollister said significantly.

"I bet you he would!" Warde said vehemently.

Spiffy flushed with embarrassment. "I used to feel swell in one," he admitted. "I honestly did, Mr. Hollister."

"Well, we'll see if we can't fix you up," Mr. Hollister said. "It's pretty near camping time too, isn't it, Warde?"

"A month yet," Warde said joyously. "And will Spiff be able to come?"

"I don't see what's going to stop him," answered Mr. Hollister genially.

Spiffy looked up and almost choked in his amazement. "I got to go to work, Mr. Hollis-

ter," he struggled nervously. "It ain't right for anyone to do anything for me when I can work."

"Calm down, Arnold," Mr. Hollister smiled. "We'll talk it all over in the library. Come in as soon as you finish."

A few minutes after, Spiffy sat down in a comfortable chair facing the man who had been an utter stranger to him only twenty-four hours before. He could not comprehend the swift change of events and looked it, drawing his brows up into a hundred tiny lines.

"You're wondering why we sent Warde up for you yesterday and why we're willing to share and share alike with you—isn't that it, Arnold?" Mr. Hollister said with a kind smile playing about the corners of his mouth.

Spiffy nodded emphatically and smiled. "That's a fact, Mr. Hollister, because nobody ever paid much attention to me before—nobody except the scouts. Tom Slade told them about me, I suppose, and they sort of always watched for me when they'd pass our house on hikes or going up the river. They always made me

feel that they wanted to make friends with me and I would have only that I never had time after school or on Saturdays. My uncle wouldn't let me mention scouts even so I couldn't have made friends with them anyway."

Mr. Hollister nodded understandingly. "Warde has often said that too, Arnold, and of course your uncle had a way of speaking his mind in public," he said. "On several occasions he has done odd jobs for me—I suppose you know?"

"He didn't talk about his business much in front of me," Spiffy said frankly. "He always whispered things as if he was afraid I'd tattle."

There came to Spiffy's mind just then one occasion when his secretive uncle had spoken disparagingly of generous Mr. Hollister. He had muttered something about the latter's failing to fully recompense him for a certain job and that he had gotten even. Just what form that reprisal had taken, Spiffy never knew.

But Mr. Hollister was well aware of what it was. A certain quantity of silverware had dis-

appeared after Bill Riker had walked away from a half-finished job, refusing to return and complete it. The Hollisters were positive of his guilt but did not try to prove it. They had in mind a certain tired and much tried woman —Spiffy's Aunt Kate.

Mr. Hollister sat thinking it over. He was willing to let the dead past bury its dead, as it were. He had done that long ago but his feeling for Bill Riker had always been one of contempt—the contempt for the strong, ambitious man for the weak and lazy one. But all that was changed—he could try and talk charitably of the misguided man now that death had closed in upon his weaknesses.

"I'm not going to be hypocritical and extol your uncle just because he is dead," said Mr. Hollister, seriously. "If in life, a man is not worthy of extolment, then neither is he when dead. And your uncle was not worthy."

Spiffy nodded vehemently. "He was mean to Aunt Kate," the boy said bravely.

"All Bridgeboro knew that, Arnold," said Mr. Hollister. "And that is why we're going

to try and be charitable in our thoughts and speech about your uncle. Because of his sudden death we are going to try and convince ourselves that he might have proved worthy after all. We will say that death snatched that chance away from him and that hereafter we will give him the full benefit of the doubt. What do you say to that kind of scouting?"

"You mean I ought to think good of him and all?" Spiffy asked.

"Yes."

Spiffy looked out of the window idly musing as some children strolled along the quiet street in their Sunday clothes. Then he turned to Mr. Hollister. "I get you all right," he said in his naive way. "I've got to be loyal on account of the quick way he was killed and that's why you sent Warde for me and all that, huh?"

"In a measure; yes," Mr. Hollister answered. "Mrs. Pearson saw Warde hurrying by and of course everyone knew of the horror then so she told him how worried she was about you because the reports were that your

cottage had been blown right into the river with your aunt and uncle in it.

"She told him in what condition you came to the Temples' in search for work—work to make up for your uncle's deficiencies, and she was greatly excited over your future in case your aunt and uncle could not be found. Warde, of course, came running home to us with the story, as much excited and equally as concerned as Mrs. Pearson was."

Spiffy's heart thumped just from sheer gratitude.

"Mrs. Hollister, being the mother of Warde," Mr. Hollister continued smilingly, "would not be satisfied until you were found and brought to her to be clothed properly and sufficiently fed. Now she is satisfied and happy and I hope you are too."

Spiffy was plainly overcome. "Gee, gee whiz," he mumbled. "I couldn't tell you how I feel—not in a thousand years!"

"I'll wait," Mr. Hollister laughed. "But one thing, Arnold, you're not fit to plunge into work just yet. You're undernourished and

you need to make up for some of the healthy exercise that you've lost."

"But . . ." Spiffy began.

"I know what you want to say," Mr. Hollister interposed. "I know too what an ambitious, independent boy you are and I think it's good for a healthy boy to work. But you're not well enough now—anyone can see that. You're not sixteen yet, are you?"

Spiffy shook his head. "Not till September," he admitted.

"Well, that settles it," said Mr. Hollister. "You go up to Temple Camp with Warde just as if you were a Hollister. Don't think of anything but play the whole summer long, and when you come back in the fall we'll see how you look and act. If you want to do something light that would keep your mind at rest as to obligations, why, all right. I wouldn't discourage that in any boy. But you can go to night school and fool them anyway, can't you?"

Spiffy nodded. "Gee, I do want an education because I want to learn things and not be lazy like my . . ."

Mr. Hollister smiled. "Don't worry about that, my boy," he said. "You couldn't be lazy if you tried. And now we'll bring our little conference to an end and call the bargain square, eh?"

He got up and strode over to the boy and grasped his thin hand. Spiffy returned the pressure as well as he was able and they smiled into each other's faces.

It was a scout handclasp.

Mr. Hollister smacked Spiffy fraternally upon the shoulder. "That wasn't doing so bad for an old scout like me, was it, Arnold?"

"Yes sir—I mean no sir," Spiffy answered, stumblingly exultant. "I'll say it wasn't."

"You know why I did it, Arnold?" he asked.

Spiffy smiled. "Yes sir," he answered happily." A scout's a brother to every other scout."

"Good!" Mr. Hollister applauded.

CHAPTER X

PICKING A WINNER?

Late that afternoon the Hollisters had a call from Mr. Temple. Spiffy was out with Warde, being shown off to other members of the fraternity, and it wasn't until they returned in time for supper that they learned of the great philanthropist's visit.

Mr. Hollister did not have anything to say about it until they were all gathered around the tea table that evening. He looked down the length of snowy table cloth and smiled at Spiffy. "A very unusual thing happened in Mr. Temple's house yesterday afternoon," he said. "It occurred either during Arnold's visit there or immediately after. Mrs. Pearson discovered it just after her talk with Warde."

Spiffy watched his host, puzzled.

"What was it?" Warde asked eagerly.

"Mr. Temple's silver service was stolen," Mr. Hollister said quietly.

Spiffy felt almost sick. "Gee, and me being there and everything! Would Mr. Temple think I did . . ."

"Wait, Arnold!" Mr. Hollister interposed, smilingly. "That's precisely what he doesn't think. That's why he came to see you?"

"*Me?*" asked Spiffy incredulously.

"Exactly," smiled Mr. Hollister. "But don't get excited about it, Arnold. Mr. Temple just wondered if you noticed anything unusual while you were there."

Spiffy thought of the front door being open. He told them about it in short, nervous accents. "Maybe that's how they got in, whoever it was," he said. "I wanted to close the door but then I thought it was none of my business."

"Well, you go over and tell him about that," Mr. Hollister said. "It might help them find some clue. Mr. Temple asked me if I would have you come after tea."

If Spiffy had had time to recover from the

shock of grief of the day before, perhaps that revelation would not have affected him. But coming at the time it did, it took another little toll from his physical resistance.

He rang the Temples' bell with trembling fingers and when Mrs. Pearson opened the door, serious and troubled looking, he felt as if he were already condemned. She put her arm around his shoulder almost patronizingly he thought and led him straight into Mr. Temple's library.

Mr. Temple rose and came toward him, smiling. "What makes you look so scared, son?" he said heartily. "Do you think I'm going to accuse a frail little youngster like yourself of carrying away that huge service?"

Spiffy's heart bounded in one leap. Mrs. Pearson too was smiling. "I really think that's what he was thinking of, Mr. Temple," she said. "As if such a thing were possible!"

Mr. Temple reached down and took Spiffy's hand. "When life makes a boy as sensitive and timid as you are now, Arnold," he said

kindly, "it's time things did change. I'm glad to see the interest that Mr. Hollister has taken in you."

Spiffy felt overwhelmed by all that kindness. And Mr. Temple had called him *Arnold!* He looked up and tried to smile his brightest at the great man. "I—gee, everybody's been nice to me—you too! I only thought you might think I did it because I was here in the house and all," he panted breathlessly. "I even didn't go in the dining-room to peek at that nice stuff because Mrs. Pearson didn't tell me I could before she went out so I wouldn't do it afterward. And I wanted to see it too!"

Mr. Temple laughed. "I bet you did," he said. "And I believe you, so we won't speak of that any more. But just one word: I know that a boy who comes seeking work in the manner that you did, doesn't come to steal."

Spiffy felt relieved for a moment but in the next second looked troubled. "Anyway, it's kind of my fault, Mr. Temple," he said. "I should have gone and closed the front door when I saw it open. I should have known that

it wouldn't be a crime to walk through your hall just to close the door. Gee whiz, if I'd have done that it wouldn't have happened maybe."

Mr. Temple waved his hand. "No vain regrets, Arnold. *If* is a vain word. You've had no more to do with it than I had. All I wanted to know was if you noticed the front hall door standing open. Now I'm satisfied that the thief came in that way—having taken advantage of Mrs. Pearson's and Kato's absence during all the excitement."

Mrs. Pearson nodded to Spiffy. "You see we're partly to blame too, Arnold," she said seriously. "Kato and I have something to think of also."

Mr. Temple smiled. "No one has anything to do with it," he said. "No one but the thief, and even he has some excuse—I could forgive one almost anything under the stress of yesterday's horror."

"Tell him about tonight's discovery," Mrs. Pearson said.

"Oh yes," Mr. Temple said. "We've re-

covered part of it—or rather the gardener found part of the service just before dark. It was hidden under the rose bushes right back of the house."

"Gee, that's fine," Spiffy said. "Then is it much more that was stolen?"

"Quite a little, yes," answered Mr. Temple. "The thief evidently meant to come back for the rest of it tonight. He couldn't carry any of it away in broad daylight when it was first stolen so he got the idea of hiding it there and last night he must have taken a part of it. You see, I didn't notify the police until this afternoon."

"Whoever it was," said Mrs. Pearson, "they certainly knew something of what Kato and I were doing. I can't conceive of a thief doing such a thing in broad daylight unless he was sure of himself."

"Well, he won't get much for what he's taken," Mr. Temple said complacently. "Monogrammed, the way the pieces are, they're not very salable—not in the places that stolen arti-

cles are sold. I doubt if he gets more than fifty dollars for the entire lot."

That ended the conference concerning the stolen silver but it did not end Mr. Temple's interest in Spiffy. He had the boy sit down and relate his life even up to the morning's talk with Mr. Hollister.

"Mr. Hollister is a very fine man, Arnold," Mr. Temple said. "He won't regret sharing with you, I'm sure. He told me he picked a winner in you and I thoroughly agree with him—so much so that I'm going to make him let me share some of the winnings too. Your little camp vacation this summer is going to be my affair."

Spiffy felt that things were coming thick and fast. "Gee whiz, Mr. Temple, gee whiz!" he stammered. "I don't know how I'm going to pay you and Mr. Hollister back for everything —I honestly don't. It'll take years because I won't be able to make much when I first go to work but I won't care as long as I can pay back!"

"I like that kind of talk," Mr. Temple said seriously. "That's why I'm going to enjoy doing things for you—that's why Mr. Hollister enjoys doing things for you. But for now, we're not going to talk about the future—we'll let it take care of itself. We're going to think of today and this summer."

"That's just what Mr. Hollister said," Spiffy said, enjoying the new order of things. "And if he said he picked a winner I'm going to show him (and you, too) that I am. I'll win no matter what and I'll be loyal—even I'll be kind of loyal to my uncle because he's dead and Mr. Hollister said it wasn't fair if I didn't on account of he didn't have a chance to show what he could have done if he had lived!"

"You talk like an Eagle Scout right now!" Mr. Temple laughed.

"I feel like one," Spiffy said frankly. "Honest I do!"

He left the Temple Mansion fully resolved "to show people." He glowed inwardly when he thought that he had been picked as a winner. That knowledge swept away all his fears

and doubts and the future seemed to shine as brightly as the stars that sparkled gaily above his head.

He jumped the steps and landed on the Hollister porch as lightly as a cat. And he whistled joyously. Mr. Hollister heard him and smiled. "Are you home so soon, Son Arnold?" the kind man asked feelingly.

Spiffy gulped in sheer joy. "Yep, *I'm home,*" he answered.

CHAPTER XI

SPIFFY AND TOM

A MONTH later Spiffy left Bridgeboro for Temple camp a full fledged member of the hilarious Silver Fox Patrol. Pee-wee Harris having scouted on a large scale in a little town called Hickson's Crossroads made that membership possible.

Roy said that Pee-wee's desertion of their famous patrol was a bit of luck for them for it gave to them Spiffy. "The only thing I miss about the kid's leaving us," Roy said as the train rumbled on up through New York State, "is Ben Maxwell's flivver. Wherever Pee-wee goes the flivver goes and if he'd stuck to us—I mean the kid, why we all could have piled into the flivver and had a nice uncomfortable ride up to Camp."

"Not saying when we'd get there," Warde added. "After the way that Lizzie behaved

when it brought us home from Hickson's Cross-roads, why, I wouldn't trust it through any mountain roads. We'd have to walk and push the flivver besides."

"That's nothing to the way you're going to walk this summer," Roy said. "We're going to have one hike after the other and more besides."

And so they talked on. Spiffy was getting used to their incessant flow of nonsense but he enjoyed it nevertheless. It kept him from dwelling too much on his own happiness for he was truly afraid that the easy life he had and would have all summer was like some flimsy bubble that must certainly burst in time.

Temple Camp was like something he had dreamed about but had never hoped to see. It spread out its dozens of log cabins right up to the very edge of the woods. And Black Lake shimmered gaily and invitingly in its midst. He had never seen anything like it before.

"Gee, I got to think and get used to it all," he told Warde when they were unpacking in the Silver Fox Patrol Cabin.

Warde laughed, "Aw, you'll get used to it, Spiff," he assured him. "By the end of the summer you won't think anything about it, I bet."

"I bet I will," Spiffy smiled.

"Hail, hail the gang's all here!" a cheerful voice echoed from outside.

"Know who that is?" Warde asked.

Tom Slade poked his tanned face in the doorway before the question could be answered. "Yep, it's me all right, kids. I came to welcome your new member."

"He's not a new member," Westy Martin said proudly. "He's just an old member with new clothes on."

"That's a good way of putting it, Westy," Tom said and strode over toward Spiffy smilingly. "Put it there, kid!"

Spiffy flushed and put out his hand. "Gee, gee," he mumbled nervously. "Gee, I'm glad to see you again, Mr. . . ."

"Cut out the mister, Spiffy, old kid," Tom said as he tousled his black wavy hair. "I'm

still Tom to you even if it was a couple of years ago that we met."

"He's Tom to everybody," said Roy. "It isn't that people don't respect him—it's just because he never wears a hat. And people—especially girls—don't like to say mister when he hasn't a hat on to tip. I'll leave it to Warde that I don't know what I'm talking about."

"Sure," agreed Warde. "We disagree perfectly."

Tom laughed. "As usual the season begins." Then to Spiffy: "Come on over to my shack as soon as you get fixed up. I'll show you the sensible side of camp and the nonsensical side (as Pee-wee calls it) I'll leave to your patrol leader."

"Atta boy, Tom," said Roy. "Pee-wee's got things to show him too if he ever gets here. He and Ben started in the flivver with the Hickson's Crossroads gang two days ago."

"Well, we'll allow him a week more then," laughed Tom. "That's why I want Spiffy to knock around with me a little bit beforehand,

because when the bunch of you start in he won't have a minute to breathe."

"We'll be generous and allow him two minutes," Roy called after Tom as he left their cabin.

"I'm glad Tom asked you," Warde said to Spiffy a few minutes afterward. "Whenever he asks a feller over to his shack that means he's interested in them. And another thing, it means he'll take you on some good hikes—not crazy hikes like we take with Roy (although, gee whiz, we do have swell times), but nice long hikes where you learn things. There isn't anything that Tom doesn't know about scouting, do you know that, Spiff?"

"Gosh, I've heard about him," Spiffy admitted. "That time when I ran away from Kanawauke and I bunked into him down in Bear Mountain—gee, I'll never forget it! He didn't holler at me or anything but it wasn't five minutes before he made me argue with him that I wasn't a quitter. And he took me back outside and set me on the right trail. It wasn't long after that that I had to leave Jersey City

on account of my mother and father but gee whiz, I always thought what a fool I had been as a scout. And Tom Slade was the one that made me feel like that!"

Spiffy wasn't long in getting fixed up and he straightway hurried to find Tom. But he was saved the trouble of going all the way as the young camp manager was strolling toward him. "I thought we'd hike around the lake a little before supper," he said as he reached the boy. "I think it's always a good thing for a newcomer to get acquainted with the lake first."

Spiffy nodded happily. "I can't paddle a canoe but I can row," he announced naively.

"That's the least of your worries," Tom said. "I remember that you can swim though —is my memory correct?"

"It sure is," Spiffy answered with a little laugh. "That's why I got in dutch at Kanawauke that time er—Tom——"

"That's the stuff," laughed Tom.

Spiffy joined in. "What I wanted to say was—I swam across the lake at night—remember me telling you that?"

Tom nodded. "It comes to me now."

"They put me to washing dishes and I ran away and you made me go back. I'm glad you did because, gee whiz, it helped me afterward when I went to live with my aunt and uncle. I haven't broke a rule since that time."

"That's fine," said Tom. "I guess you found out that it does pay its own dividends—I mean honesty. Breaking rules comes under that too, Spiff. It's just the same as stealing. You'll find that as long as you obey the laws of this camp, the managers will stand by you in everything. They're the finest bunch in the world if they see that you abide by the rules. Don't forget that, will you, Spiff?"

"Gee, I'll say I won't!" Spiffy exclaimed vehemently. "Anyhow, I'm much different than I used to be. Even Mr. Temple agreed with Mr. Hollister that he picked a winner in me. They know I'll be loyal all the time now. Nothing could make me change—gee whiz!"

"I believe you," Tom said quietly.

Spiffy strode along at his side, silent for a little while. He was thinking of Tom adding

his few words of faith to that steadily mounting list. Mr. Temple and the Hollisters, his own patrol—the whole troop, in fact, and now Tom! They had all pledged themselves to a sort of trust in him. He had a good many to keep faith with. But he knew he could do it.

"I won't have much to do in the morning, Spiff," Tom said, rousing him out of his reverie. "We'll take a real hike up a mountain trail before Pee-wee gets here."

Spiffy smiled. "Can't we ever go after he does get here?" he asked.

"Sure," Tom answered. "Only I wouldn't take you away from one of those hikes for the world. You'd miss the time of your life if you miss even one and they're always sure to have a lot after they first get here. After a while when it gets so hot they're not quite as willing. But don't worry, kiddo, I intend seeing a lot of you. I was sorry to hear of all the bad breaks you had since that time but it's all over now, isn't it?"

"I hope to tell you!" Spiffy laughed.

They came around again and stood on the

shore watching a man busy at the boat landing painting canoes. He had his back to them but every now and then as he reached into one of the paint pots beside him, Spiffy caught a glimpse of a black beard.

"Gee, what does a man want a beard like that for!" he commented idly.

"That's what I'd like to know, Spiff," Tom said. "He's a queer duck, anyway, that chap. He strolled in here one day—oh, it was in June, I guess. At any rate we were just opening up. He asked for some odd jobs to do around and Uncle Jeb (he's our real camp manager) told him he could paint the canoes and fix up the boat landing and things like that. He's done a little bit of everything until there's nothing much left for him to do except those few canoes and perhaps a job or two in the eats shack. After that he'll have to find something else."

"What's his name?" Spiffy asked disinterestedly.

"None of us know that," Tom answered. "He told us to call him Captain when he first came but if you ask me I think he ought to be

called plain hobo. He's hardly spoken a dozen words since he's been here. Just says yes or no."

The man in question straightened his tall, thin body to its full height and took two or three steps nearer the water. Spiffy was fascinated by those few movements but he was at a loss to know why.

CHAPTER XII

WITH THE NIGHT

After supper Spiffy found himself alone and he wasn't sorry. Warde and all the rest were on their annual round of renewing old feuds and friendships as Roy expressed it. He wasn't to join them until camp-fire and it gave him a few quiet hours in which to think of the tumultous existence that had been his since that tragic day in upper North Bridgeboro.

He strolled out on the boat landing and sat down, letting his long thin legs dangle over just above the water line. The sun had almost dropped behind the grim-looking mountain and Spiffy enjoyed watching the deep scarlet slowly turning to that purplish hue one sees in the country. It cast thousands of tiny shadows upon the lake and it was this that he was watching when he heard a footstep behind him.

He glanced over his shoulder and saw that

it was Captain looking over the canoes to see how they were drying. The man stood in such a position that Spiffy could only see his profile —that is, what there was of it. The rest was hidden by an unkempt beard.

Spiffy looked again. The man's nose fascinated him in just the same manner that his slow movements had before. He wondered what it was and continued to stare.

Somehow he was aware that the man saw him—that he missed nothing. Spiffy switched his body around and spread his legs out upon the landing. "Are they dry?" he asked the man pleasantly.

The man continued looking at the canoes as if he had not heard. Spiffy knew that it was only pretense and tried again. "Are they dry?" he asked in a loud voice as if he thought the man was deaf.

Captain turned his head a fraction of an inch, "Mm," he muttered without opening his mouth.

Something spurred Spiffy on. "They ought to be dry," he persisted. "The sun was out strong enough."

Captain made no comment to that. Instead he walked away to the farther side of the landing and inspected a few more canoes glistening with their fresh coats of paint. It enraged Spiffy somehow to have the man ignore him like that. He got up and followed him.

"I know your name," Spiffy said, not knowing what else to talk about. "It's Captain, isn't it?"

The man's back certainly was not encouraging but Spiffy stood there waiting. "Can't you talk at all?" he asked almost rudely.

"B-b-busy!" the man almost hissed.

"Oh," said Spiffy.

He loitered about while the man continued his silent inspection. Spiffy was disgusted and decided to go back to the edge of the landing. He took a step forward and caught his foot in a loose board. While he was trying to extricate it he glanced up suddenly and caught the man staring straight at him.

Spiffy immediately returned the stare but the man turned away. "Gee," he said, "I've seen your eyes somewhere, mister. Ain't it

funny, but you interest me awful. Even when I was talking to Tom Slade before supper and we were watching you paint the canoes I had a feeling that I knew you or saw you somewhere."

"No," the man's mouth managed to mutter somewhere under the beard.

"I s'pose everyone has an experience like that though, huh?" Spiffy queried. "They say everybody's got a double."

Captain made no answer to that but quickly turned and walked off the landing onto the shore. "He sure is a queer duck," Spiffy commented aloud. "Just like Tom said. But I can't get it out of my head that I know him. 'Specially when he walks—I'm surer than ever then."

The gathering dusk made him forget about it however. He reluctantly left the landing and in the preparations for camp-fire he had no thoughts save grateful ones toward Mr. Hollister and Mr. Temple who had made it all possible for him.

He found the greatest thrill in scouting

around the camp-fire that night. The stories and toasted marshmallows put him in a delightful frame of mind but when he was undressing for bed a sickening feeling in the pit of his stomach rather dulled the memory of it.

He crawled under the light blanket and tried to think only of the blessings that were his and his first day in camp. But he soon realized that to over indulge in marshmallows just before retiring was nothing short of foolish. He couldn't think—he could only lie there and suffer.

He hated getting up right away for fear of disturbing the others and tried to bear with it until they were sound asleep. It seemed hours before he heard that hush of easy breathing coming from all sides of the spacious cabin. Then he got up.

Quietly he put on his clothes thinking that he might catch Mr. Ellsworth, the scoutmaster, still up. If not, he fervently hoped that he would find someone, for his trouble was annoying him greatly. And like a mouse he crept into the darkness outside.

HE SIGHED WITH RELIEF WHEN HE SAW THE FLASHLIGHT DIRECTED AT THE MAN'S FEET.

Spiffy Henshaw. *Page* 103

It was moonless and almost starless. He stood just outside of the door and peered about but not a light could he see in the length or breadth of the camp. Obviously, everyone was exhausted from the exciting day.

He drank in the fresh, night air and was soon aware that the sickening feeling was passing. He paced up and down quietly, finding that it helped him still more and after ten minutes or so the trouble left him entirely.

By that time he was wide awake and keenly alert and felt that he could almost start the day over again. A soft, sweet smelling breeze brushed his cheek and an owl hooted eerily in the distance. Some bull frogs began their usual orchestral offering but ceased as quickly as they started. He wondered why.

It was all very still and new and strange to Spiffy. But he was not lonely nor homesick in the least. Was not Mr. Temple the very soul of the camp? He asked himself that question just because he knew the answer.

The night and the stillness only drew him closer to the man who had sent him there. He

went over underneath the elm tree that shaded their cabin from the hot summer sun and sat down in the dew-laden grass. It was too pleasant outdoors to think of sleeping and he promised himself just a few minutes more of it.

A few solemn moments passed by before he was attracted by the tiniest glimmer of a light. It came from the boat landing and as he watched, it grew a little until it finally assumed the proportions of a small, live coal. At least, it looked like one, as it drew nearer.

Suddenly the boy detected footfalls, ever so light and stealthy. He knew they were not far away from him and instinctively he drew up close to the tree out of the path. The leaves stirred slightly above his head and one dropped down on his neck. On that little breeze came the scent of a strong cigar.

His heart thumped strangely as the footfalls stole silently along, came up to him and passed on. He stood up and peered out from under the tree into the darkness. The figure shambled on in the direction of Jeb's Trail.

Spiffy wondered what he should do.

CHAPTER XIII

CAPTAIN

After all, he asked himself, was it so strange that someone in camp should be out? Was not he himself up and loath to go to bed? Anyone had that privilege as long as they didn't go out on the lake. The management wanted the boys to be in bed at nine o'clock, but if they couldn't sleep and wished to stroll around for a half hour or so it wasn't contrary to any of their rules.

Spiffy argued all this with himself and yet he did not feel satisfied. Something told him that the man's stealthy footfalls weren't sincere. They did not bespeak an innocent, nocturnal stroll. And to satisfy himself he stepped out into the path and up Jeb's Trail.

He stole cautiously along through the dark, being not yet familiar with that trail as were his brother scouts. But he concentrated all his

attention upon those stealthy footfalls that kept just ahead of him.

The trail led through a little patch of woods that ran up to the roadway. It was there that Temple Campers waited for the mail and for the bus into Catskill. In point of fact, it was the stepping off place of Temple Camp, or the sliding-off place as Roy Blakely had once called it having reference to the little rustic bench with its galaxy of initials carved into the wood, and he had explained that if one were clever enough one could slide off the high seat into the bus without much exertion. However, no one claimed the distinction of having accomplished this hazardous feat, not even Roy himself.

Suddenly the footfalls ceased and Spiffy stopped too. He could not see, but he judged that the man was not more than twenty-five feet ahead of him. Hardly far enough for him to take any foolhardy chances.

All was still for a few tense moments, then Spiffy heard the unmistakable sound of crack-

ling twigs and dried leaves being crushed under foot. He knew then that the man was off the path and going further into the woods.

Dare he follow him?

Impulse triumphed over whatever fear he had and soon he was cautiously following the sound, stopping every few seconds behind some protecting tree. He had no way of knowing whether or not the man had stopped.

Presently a light glimmered not fifty yards distant and Spiffy clung to the damp bark of the tree. He sighed with relief in the next second when he saw that the flashlight was not directed upon him but upon the ground at the man's feet.

The man kept his back toward Spiffy and laid the flashlight down upon a huge log. Then very casually he rolled up the sleeves of his khaki shirt and set about pulling up the earth with his bare hands. The boy looked on curiously.

For fully five minutes the man brought up the earth in handsful and carefully laid it to

one side. Then he stopped and gazed abstractedly, Spiffy thought, into the excavation that he had just made.

Spiffy wished heartily that he too could look into it. He was wondering what it could possibly hold when the man began replacing the dirt just as carefully as he had pulled it up. After five minutes more he rolled down his sleeves.

Spiffy got behind the tree and for a breathless second he thought that the man had caught the sound. But he was reassured to see him extinguish the light without turning around.

Spiffy distinguished the sound of his stepping over the log and back out onto the trail again. He waited a few minutes before following and when he did it was with the utmost caution. There was something that smacked of dishonesty about the whole affair and the boy knew that any man who stole about in the still hours of night and cached things in the woods would not stop at trying to seal the lips of his accuser.

He let the man put a great deal of distance between them and wished that he had had pres-

ence of mind to steal into the cabin and get his flashlight (a present from Mr. Hollister) before he tried to pursue the stealthy figure. He was still trying to solve the problem when he reached camp.

It was a relief to get into the open and despite the darkness it was better than the inky blackness of the woods. He hurried along toward his cabin, thoroughly tired from his excitement. He would be glad to get into bed now, he told himself.

Just as he came up near the door he heard a sound that stopped him short in his tracks. He went on tiptoe over to the side of the log structure, listening the while for a repetition of it. But everything seemed suddenly quiet and he peered around the corner post.

The smell of the strong cigar struck him full in the face and just as he went to pull back his head the tiny oval of light at its tip outlined faintly the smoker's face. Spiffy was aghast.

It was the man Captain, standing against the door of his own patrol cabin and obviously listening intently for some sounds from within.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CACHE

Spiffy did not challenge him but waited until he had walked away toward the boat landing and was swallowed up by the darkness. He was fully satisfied that the man was dishonest.

He went to bed, happy that he at last would be of some service to the scouts and thrilled with the thought of how he would be envied when it was made known that he had discovered a suspicious character right there in their midst. That would certainly be observance par excellence.

He slept well all through the night and awakened with the others refreshed and eager for another day. And his experiences of the night he rehearsed over and over while he was dressing and he could almost see the look of surprise on Tom's face when he should tell him after breakfast.

Spiffy came out of the eats shack with his patrol and as his date with Tom was known he was allowed to leave them. The rest were going to hike part way to Catskill to see if they could see anything of Pee-wee and Ben.

"If we don't see them," Roy explained, "we'll see what remains of them. Maybe the Hickson's Crossroads bunch were too much for Lizzie. I wouldn't blame her—they were too much for me."

Spiffy laughed and watched them until the trees of Jeb's Trail hid them from view. Then he hurried over toward Tom's shack. "I wonder when I should tell him about it?" he asked himself aloud. Then he came to the door and knocked.

At that same moment he noticed a note pinned to the wood and as there was no response to his summons he took it for granted that it was for him. Hastily he pulled it down and opened it. It read

Spiff:

Starting for Catskill now—six o'clock. Have to look out for some baggage that's been mixed

up down there and won't be back until noontime.

Don't be disappointed because we'll find something to do this afternoon and my promise for an all day hike still holds good.

Tom.

Spiffy folded the piece of paper up again and put it in his pocket.

He wasn't disappointed exactly but he wished that he had come up to the cabin before his patrol left to hunt up Pee-wee's remains. Then he smiled. Likely as not, he told himself, they wouldn't get back to camp when they said they would and if Tom came back at noontime, why, he would have had to disappoint him. He would much rather it should be the way it was.

He strolled idly around and conceived the idea that Jeb's Trail might give him a different impression in the daytime than it did at night. There might just be a chance that he could hunt out the spot and so he acted upon the impulse.

He followed it along, not being able to distinguish any footsteps. Too many came and went over that Trail during the course of the

early morning. But Spiffy had known enough of scouting before to realize that if Captain had cached anything in through those trees he would have a definite trail marker.

He was not long in guessing what that might be. Presently he came to a pair of stubby pines at the right of the Trail. It seemed likely enough that the man had made them serve his purpose and the boy looked up and down the trail to see if he was being followed. Then he slipped in between the trees.

He tried to retrace his steps in there, however, but did not succeed. Captain's, he found, and followed them until he came to the log. There the tracks were very distinct and it helped him considerably in picking out the exact spot where the man had pulled up the earth. An innocent looking twig was covering it.

Spiffy had only pulled a few handfuls up when he knew that he was on the right track. The earth had evidently been tampered with many times before as it yielded to the boy's merest touch.

He worked quickly and quietly looking be-

hind every few minutes and at last his hand struck something hard. A gleam of metal caught his eye and he put his hand down and brought up a small urn of silver and gold. As he turned it around in the dim light of the woodland he saw the monogram T.

He laid it beside him and with breathless excitement uncovered more. Each one bore the same letter and all in all there were a half-dozen pieces. He stood them in a row and stared at their shining beauty with wondering eyes.

Voices from up on the Trail echoed about him and he decided to replace the stolen things. Captain would not be leaving Camp for a few days anyhow. Tom Slade had told him that. He would have to wait for his money besides and Spiffy wondered why the man had come up to the very camp that Mr. Temple had endowed after stealing from him.

It was a mystery to him and he replaced the earth carefully and hurried back to the Trail. He was puzzled as to what to do first or say. Certainly Mr. Temple would be overjoyed to

think that his protégée had recovered his treasured service and the thief too. Spiffy decided then that the best one to go to in Tom's absence was his scoutmaster, Mr. Ellsworth.

He hurried along, almost ran and with a sinking heart saw the familiar shambling gait of Captain coming toward him. What could he be doing away from his work at that hour? Was he nervous about his cache?

And then he came face to face with the man, thinking that the beard looked more grotesque than ever in the dim light of the Trail. He stood in such a position that the man would have to step in some marshy spots in order to get out of his way and go on.

"Are you going away or something?" Spiffy asked looking straight at him.

The man kept his eyes averted still but the boy did not miss the nervous look in them. Also he saw Captain in a better light than at the boat landing the evening before. A cold, dreadful fear filled Spiffy's soul.

It couldn't be!

"Why don't you answer me when I talk to

you?" Spiffy asked bravely, yet tremblingly.

The man turned his head away. "Got-to-go," he mumbled under his beard and endeavored to step over the boy's foot.

Spiffy jumped back two, three steps deliberately barring the way. "No, you don't!" he said in a shaking voice. "I got to know who you are and where you're going first!"

Captain put out his arm and pushed him aside and walked on in silence. Spiffy threw all caution to the winds and went after him. "I'll keep after you just like this," he flung sharply at the man's back. "If I think you're trying to get away without the camp managers knowing it I'll yell my head off, I will!"

The man kept on going and presently they reached the stubby pines again. Here he stopped and Spiffy smiled triumphantly. "I know your secret!" he exclaimed impulsively. "Just try and do anything now and you'll hear some noise!"

Captain looked at him squarely. Spiffy knew that his fears were right. He put his

hand over his mouth to keep from crying aloud. The man turned pleading eyes upon him.

"What is it all about?" Spiffy cried in distraction. "Why are you here and what did you do it for? Oh, my. . . ."

"Sh!" The man looked up and down the Trail like some hunted animal.

"So, you're a thief and a liar—you're everything when you're supposed to be dead and Mr. Hollister was telling me all the time how I should be loyal to you!" Spiffy fairly screamed.

Bill Riker put out his hands and patted him on the shoulder. "Come in here where we can talk," he said in his lazy, familiar tones. "Come in, Arnold, and I'll tell you all about what happened to your poor old Uncle Bill!"

CHAPTER XV

LOYALTY

Spiffy followed his uncle back through the woods. His heart felt weighted down by this sudden, awful revelation. To find that he was not dead after all—to know that he was a thief. And to have stolen from the kindly Mr. Temple, of all men!

The poor, harassed boy paused and drew his cold, nervous hand across his hot forehead. A look of disgust crept into his dark eyes as he saw the shambling lazy gait of his uncle leading him straight to the cache.

He looked behind him. They were out of sight and hearing of Jeb's Trail. He ran right up to his uncle who had then paused by the log. "You're a thief, Uncle Bill," he said in quivering tones. "I saw the whole thing and all last night. You can't say you're not because

I dug it up even this morning and it's Mr. Temple's silver service."

Bill Riker blanched under his beard. "Is it stealing exactly when a man half pays a poor man for a job like Mr. Temple did me and I get even by taking some of his silver?" he whined.

"It's stealing," said Spiffy firmly. "Another thing, you can't tell me Mr. Temple half paid you for a job. I know different. He's been kind to me—a thousand times more kind than you'd be even if you had his money. You ain't got an excuse. How is it you didn't get killed?" Spiffy hurled his words at the cringing man. His sense of right and wrong gave him courage now.

Bill Riker trembled inwardly. He saw that he no longer had the same nephew to deal with. A month with the Hollisters had added to Spiffy both physically and mentally. The weak, disreputable looking man knew that the argument he had prepared would fall on deaf ears.

As if to read his thoughts Spiffy said: "I'm not like I used to be, I can tell you that. The

Hollisters have been taking care of me and I've learned things and besides I'm a scout. I know you can't make right out of stealing—no matter what you say you can't make it right. Gee, I thought I'd be happy and all from now on—I thought I'd never have to live again as poor as I did with you. Except for poor Aunt Kate. . . ."

A thought instantly made radiant Bill Riker's face. He smiled funereally. "If you knew how worried your poor Aunt Kate's been about you," he said in his sing-song way. "If you knew how terrible that storm was and all and what a narrow escape she and I had, you wouldn't . . ."

"What do you mean?" Spiffy demanded, his eyes widening with surprise. "What do you mean, *Aunt Kate!*"

"Just what I said before," Bill Riker answered with satisfaction. "She and I just escaped with our necks and it's ungrateful for you to talk like that. You must o' seen we didn't have anything left so what else was there for us to do but disappear and make it

seem like we'd been killed? What else could we do when everybody in Bridgeboro was after us for money? In a way that storm was lucky for us because now we can sort of start life all over again."

"Where is Aunt Kate now?" Spiffy asked anxiously. "Why didn't she write to me that she was safe when she must have known I was worrying something terrible for a long while after?"

Bill Riker expanded visibly. "It's because she ain't selfish," he answered. "She's got your interest at heart more'n you have hers. I found out how nice the Hollisters were a-doin' fer you and I made up my mind you were better off and so did she as much as she misses you. She's a-livin' in a furnished room in New York 'n' I came up here and let my beard grow because I didn't want anyone to recognize me. And I made sure it grew long enough too."

Spiffy had relented in so far as his aunt was concerned. But as he surveyed his uncle he felt only that old sense of distrust and contempt for him. "Do you think that's going to

keep people from recognizing you?" Spiffy asked. "I sort of suspected it right from the beginning only I didn't know that's what it was then so do you think with all these fellers from Bridgeboro here that one of them won't recognize you?"

"Boys ain't like men, Arnold," his uncle answered smilingly. "Anyhow, I wouldn't know any of them scouts if I fell over them. Even Warde Hollister I only know from a distance and it's the same with the rest. So they'd have to be pretty smart to tell me now."

Spiffy realized that what he said was true and he felt relieved. It would be a terrible thing to have them find out, he told himself. He was sure that it would be a reflection upon himself. "You didn't tell me yet why you stole those things from a nice man like Mr. Temple is!" he said tersely.

Bill Riker smiled confidently. "Don't get excited, Arnold," he wheezed. "That's how I come to do it—I was so excited. Anyway, your Aunt Kate and I saw what was coming and we ran out to the road. A man in a New

York car came along and we asked him to take us down to Bridgeboro so we could get to you.

"Well, when we got in front of Mr. Temple's your aunt said she'd wait outside while I went in for you. So on account of the front door bein' open I walked in and I yelled and all and nobody answered. You must o' gone by that time and I was sort o' frantic on account of that too. Anyway, like a poor sinner that I am, Arnold, I got to thinking how much that silver would help your poor Aunt Kate at a time like that. There we was and you was without a home nor a penny and the devil got to urging me, I s'pose, that Mr. Temple had more than he could use in five hundred years."

"Did Aunt Kate know you took it?" Spiffy asked quickly.

"Hold on now, Arnold, hold on," said Bill Riker. "I didn't take it then—that is, I didn't take it away. I hid it under some bushes outside o' the house. O' course your aunt wouldn' o' stood fer it, I knew that, but she was down and out and I made up that I'd come back fer it so I told the feller if he'd drive us to New

York he'd do a big favor fer a couple o' homeless creatures. I made him think we had relatives in New York what we were goin' to. Anyway, I got your aunt safe in a furnished room and I come back to Bridgeboro the next night and I took some of it so's I could keep her from starvin'. That's when I spied you a-goin' ter Hollister's with Warde and I knew you were taken care of."

Spiffy melted somewhat. "How did you get out here then?" he asked anxiously.

"Ah, my boy," Riker answered patronizingly, "that's where my conscience came in. I couldn' sell that silver somehow—it went agin me and I couldn' face your aunt bein' a thief so I packed it in a cheap bag what I bought and sneaked a ride on a freight train. When the train stopped I crawled out and found I was in Catskill—of all places. I knew Temple's camp was somewheres in the neighborhood but I was afraid I'd be recognized so I laid low and got odd jobs till my beard grew enough. So when I was hired here I buried the stuff

and made up my mind I'd send it back to Mr. Temple as soon as I could and work honest and send your aunt my money every week."

Spiffy smiled. "Gee, honest, do you mean that, Uncle Bill?"

Bill Riker nodded. "Honest, so don't go and give me away because I need the money I got here to send your poor aunt. Maybe you could even influence that Slade feller ter let me stay a while longer."

"Gee, sure I will!" Spiffy exclaimed. "Gee, I'm glad about the silver though. Mr. Temple's coming for the swimming test in two weeks. So while he's here couldn't you sneak the silver in his car or something so he'll never know who did it?"

"That's a good idea, Arnold," his uncle said, but lacking Spiffy's enthusiasm. "He'll never know that way."

Spiffy grew thoughtful as he watched his uncle. "When you get to making money sometime," he said, "will you try and pay Mr. Temple back what you owe him?"

"Yeh, sure," Bill said. "Only don't give me away." Then: "Account of your poor Aunt Kate."

Spiffy's eyes were misty. "I won't," he said slowly. "On account of her I got to be loyal just like Mr. Hollister told me."

CHAPTER XVI

LOOKING FORWARD

Spiffy returned to his patrol cabin feeling that he had been robbed of the summer's joy. In a sense he felt that his uncle had stolen it from him and that it would lie in that cache in the woods along with the silver until Mr. Temple came to camp and his property was returned to him.

Meanwhile he must keep up the subterfuge of ignoring the shiftless, bearded man. Also he must find some way of asking Tom to keep his uncle at camp for a while so that his aunt might benefit by it. He realized that it would be his first step in deception and the knowledge was not pleasant. He had never lied in his life before—not even when he was an unworthy scout. And in his disappointment he dared to think that the escape of his aunt and uncle had proved a curse rather than a blessing.

In this frame of mind he started out from camp with Tom Slade. It was right after lunch and about one o'clock. "We'll just call this a tramp in recognition of our friend Captain's services," Tom laughed.

Spiffy winced a trifle. How could Tom know why his uncle looked like a tramp, the boy assured himself. "May-maybe he's got reason for looking like that," he said aloud. "Maybe he's had sorrow, sort of, and that's the reason he doesn't talk, huh?"

Tom put his arm about Spiffy's shoulder as they walked along. "You never can tell, Spiff," he answered. "If you think so why I'll think so."

Spiffy felt relieved and was anxious to get the subject over with. "I guess he's not so bad," he said. "He told me he needed work so he could send the money to his wife in New York. So that shows he's honest and all, doesn't it, Mr. . . . I mean, Tom?"

Tom laughed. "I can see you've picked yourself to champion his cause, haven't you, Spiff?"

"Well, kind of," the boy answered. "I feel sorry for anyone who's trying to be all right and can't get work. And he's had trouble, so he told me, and I guess if you had any more work for him for the next few weeks, why he'd be glad."

"And so would you," Tom smiled. "Wouldn't you now?"

"Oh, I guess so," he answered, a little embarrassed.

Tom misconstrued Spiffy's blush. "I never thought you were sentimental, you little rascal," he laughed. "But don't feel ashamed of it. It's a good fault at times."

"Then you are going to give him some work, huh?" Spiffy persisted.

"If you say so, kiddo," Tom answered. "I'll do anything to make you feel satisfied here. I want you to know that we scouts are *scouts!*"

"Gee, I know that, all right," Spiffy returned. "Even if you couldn't give him the work I wouldn't think any different about you or Mr. Temple or anyone that's a scout."

"Now that's talking," laughed Tom. "But

don't worry Spiff, I'll see what I can do for your bearded friend. We'll rake up something if it's only leaves."

"That sounds like Roy Blakeley," Spiffy laughed.

They walked on and upward. Soon they struck a little used mountain trail. Tom kept his eyes upon the ground for a little while, then paused. "Someone about your size has stolen the march on us, Spiff," he announced.

"What does that mean, Tom?" the boy asked.

"I mean some kid about your size (that is, judging from the size of his feet) has just walked this way. He can't be any more than fifteen minutes ahead of us," he answered, studying the ground intently.

Spiffy looked at him in admiration. "Gee, I couldn't be the kind of a scout that you are in a thousand years," he said frankly. "I could look all over the ground from now until tomorrow morning and I wouldn't know anything about it."

"That isn't anything to feel discouraged

about," Tom said, glancing at him quizzically. "You see, Spiff, the great thing about scouting is that there are scouts and scouts. I've always been the kind of a scout that was happiest on the trail and poking around woods. And after all these years at it I ought to know a footprint when I see one."

They both laughed heartily. "Anyhow, you're the best kind of a scout," he said meaningly. "I can't do anything but swim, gee whiz——"

"You funny kid," Tom said. "Isn't that something to be proud of? As long as a scout makes it his business to do one thing well that's all scouting expects of him."

"Well, maybe," Spiffy answered rather halfheartedly. "It never got me anywheres though."

"Keep on trying then," Tom said encouragingly. "Practice makes a good scout and if it never gets you any farther than around the lake it will be something, won't it? It will be better than never getting anywhere at all."

"Can you swim good?" Spiffy asked him.

"Only enough to exercise," Tom answered. "You see, I never cared about it to the exclusion of everything else. That is why I doubt if I could hold my own in a crisis."

"Gee whiz," Spiffy murmured. "I like it better than anything else—I could swim dandy when I was a scout before but when I went to live with my uncle I had to give it up, sort of. I didn't go in more than three or four times and we lived right above the river too."

"Then, now is your chance," Tom said. "Take up where you left off and put your name in for the elimination contest next week. If you happen to win, your troop would be tickled. There isn't one of them that's eligible this year —they've all been in on it before so that lets them out. You can only try for it once, that's the rule."

"Then if I'm not eliminated I can try in the finals when Mr. Temple comes, huh?" he asked enthusiastically.

Tom nodded. "He'd be pleased to see that, Spiff," he said. "Mr. Temple would rather

see you try for something like that than to hear you say you're grateful."

"Gee, I hope I can win it then," the boy said with glistening, hopeful eyes.

"Don't say you *hope,* Spiff," Tom said. "Say you *will win* it."

"I will win it, then!" Spiffy repeated. "Is that better?"

"Absolutely," Tom answered.

CHAPTER XVII

ADDISON UPP

They walked on for a time in silence. Spiffy was thinking of the glory that might be his if he was lucky. He was proud of his troop and especially of his patrol. He wanted them to be proud of him also and he knew that he could do nothing greater than to walk off with the Rhodes Life Saving Award of the season.

The Rhodes Award was given annually to the winner of Temple Camp's swimming event —the lake race. To swim the breadth of that body of water was not for the puny boys and with palpitating heart Spiffy wondered if he could practice enough in one week to accomplish such a feat.

Tom, true to himself, was going along with his eyes still upon the ground and Spiffy's eyes were roving somewhere up in the clouds. At any rate, he caught sight of some earth and

stones moving down upon them from the second ledge. In its wake was a huge rock coming at a terrific rate of speed.

Spiffy grabbed Tom and pulled him back. The rock came on, made a terrible thud as it landed in the path just ahead of them and tumbled over and down into the valley.

They stood stark still until the earth and stones had settled. "Phew!" Tom exclaimed. "You saved me from a good whack that time, Spiff. I'd never have seen it, I was so interested in these footsteps."

Spiffy laughed in sheer relief. "I'm glad now I'm not your kind of a scout because if I hadn't been sort of dreaming about things I wouldn't have seen it either."

Tom looked up at the ledge from which had come the miniature avalanche. A figure in khaki was peering at them through the luxuriant growth. "Say!" Tom called. "Come down here, whoever you are, and apologize. You almost killed us by scrambling up there, do you know that?"

Spiffy looked up in time to see the figure

come out of hiding. It was a boy about his own age and height. He stood watching the two below as if he didn't know whether or not to do as Tom bade. Finally he moved and started to come down.

"This is a queer kid that you're going to meet," Tom told Spiffy in an undertone. "He belongs to a Connecticut troop and he's their odd number. There's one in every troop, I guess. His name is Addison Upp."

Addison Upp clambered over the rough stones and landed heavily on his feet. He glanced at Tom casually, then turned his attention to Spiffy. There was a suggestion of hostility in his small blue eyes.

"You're looking at Spiffy Henshaw, Addison," Tom laughed. "Spiffy hasn't an enemy in the world and he's a second class scout in good standing of the Silver Fox Patrol, First Bridgeboro Troop. Anything else you want to know about him can be answered by asking me."

Addison Upp stared at Tom, then at Spiffy. "If you're a Silver Fox then you think you're

smart, I bet," he said in a slow deliberate voice.

"I bet I don't," Spiffy said good-naturedly.

"They all think they are in that patrol," the boy said in the tone of one who has a chip on the shoulder. "Especially Roy Blakeley—I don't like him."

"He's my leader!" Spiffy returned. "And I like him."

"Addison gets mad at Roy," Tom explained then, "because he teases him about his name. You know how Roy is—he shortened it to Add Upp and says he wants to know the answer."

"Yeh, and they all laugh at that," interposed Addison sulkily. "They haven't anything else to laugh about."

"Laugh and the world laughs with you, kiddo," Tom said seriously. "Everyone else laughs with Roy so why not try it yourself?"

"Because I got too much sense," the queer boy answered. "I got more to think of."

"That's pretty serious for a boy to have too much sense," Tom continued. "What kick do you get out of camp then?"

"I can swim—I'll even be a expert when the rest of those fools are still talking nonsense," he said in all seriousness. "I'm going to win the lake race, I am."

"Now you're talking like a scout," Tom smiled. "Spiffy here has the same idea!"

"Winning the race?" Addison demanded.

"That's what," Tom answered, soberly. "You see, Mr. Rhodes hadn't any idea you would be the only kid who wanted to win that race this summer. If he did he would have given you the award without having any race at all."

Spiffy laughed outright at the serious scowl that Addison affected. "I can't swim so good," he assured the boy. "Don't let Tom kid you. Maybe I won't even get by the elimination contest."

Addison scowled on, studying Spiffy intently. "I bet you won't win," he announced decisively.

"If he don't I'll be disappointed in him," Tom interposed. "So will his patrol."

"Don't worry," Spiffy said smilingly. "I

have as good a chance as—as anyone, haven't I?''

''You bet,'' smiled Tom.

''I got to track somethin','' Addison mumbled. ''I'm goin'.'' He turned on his heel precipitately and walked away.

''I didn't exaggerate about him, did I, Spiff?'' Tom asked after Addison was well out of earshot.

Spiffy watched the departing boy's figure and shook his head. ''What's the matter with him, anyway?'' he asked.

Tom smiled. ''He thinks the whole world's conspiring against him because of his name. He has a chip on his shoulder like you used to have. The difference between you is that you had a sense of humor and Addison hasn't. I feel sorry for him sometimes and then other times I'm not—like now. He deliberately turned down a good laugh that time.''

''I guess he's mad because I'm a Silver Fox and because I'm going to try for the race too, huh?'' Spiffy queried anxiously.

''I suppose he is, kiddo,'' answered Tom.

"Don't you care though. It'll make you that much more keen about winning when you know you have a competitor, won't it?"

"Sure," Spiffy answered. "But I hope he doesn't get mad on account of that. He acted so grouchy."

"Oh, you'll get used to him, kiddo," Tom said complacently. "He gets that way once in a while and comes up here tracking. I suppose that's the reason he climbed up on that ledge—to get away from us. He sure is one queer kid—even his own patrol can't understand him but they have to put up with him. He's a good swimmer and he's brought them more than one laurel. There isn't anything he doesn't know in scouting, I'll say that for him. He ought to learn a little about cultivating cheerfulness."

"That's more important than anything else, Roy said," Spiffy commented as they started walking back toward camp. "Even Mr. Ellsworth agreed with him."

"So do I," Tom said. "The only way to

cure Addison is to give him a smile for every scowl."

"Gee, that's easy," said Spiffy lightly.

Yet he knew somehow that it would not be easy at all. He felt that Addison Upp had fairly challenged him. It was an entirely new experience to Spiffy.

CHAPTER XVIII

A THREAT?

Day followed upon day until a week had passed. Spiffy had trained sedulously and felt confident that he would not be eliminated from the contest. He was happy in the thought that before the next day's sun had set he would know.

Now and again throughout that week of training he had encountered Addison Upp both in the water and out. He had never failed to greet the boy other than in true scout fashion —with a smile and a word of encouragement, but the queer, reticent boy rebuffed each effort.

"Look out for yourself," he said in answer to Spiffy's usual greeting the day before the contest. "I'll win all right without you telling me. Anyhow, I don't want any advice from you."

Pee-wee Harris and Ben Maxwell who had long since forgotten about their rough journey in the flivver, were seated with the members of Spiffy's patrol at the boat landing's very edge. There were twelve pair of legs dangling precariously above the water. All were listening intently to the various remarks from the swimmers.

Spiffy had been manoeuvering with an overhand stroke for some few minutes before he came back to where his competitor was rigorously trying an Australian crawl. "Gee, Add," he said in his pleasant voice, "I wasn't trying to give you advice before because I know when it comes to that you'd be the one to give it to me."

Addison stopped for a moment and turned on his back. "It's a good thing you know that," he said rather triumphantly. "You haven't got a swell head—that's one thing."

Spiffy did not know whether to feel complimented or not. Roy Blakeley's eyes glistened. "Don't let him kid you, Spiff," he said in his

inimitable way. "There's only one feller around here that has a swell head and that's two and two."

"Two and two!" Spiffy repeated laughingly. "Who's that?"

"Add Upp," laughed Roy.

Spiffy got a mouthful of Black Lake before he finished laughing. Addison floated around quietly, almost menacingly. "I knew you were as big a fool as *they* are," he said, bitingly sarcastic. "All Roy Blakeley can think of is foolishness and to make fun of my name."

"Don't be such a sorehead," Westy Martin called to him. "There's hardly anyone in camp that hasn't been nicknamed by Roy and yet you're the only one to get peeved."

"Sure," chimed in Pee-wee. "Look at Badleigh Manners! Gee whiz, he's called Bad Manners all the time now and he doesn't mind it—even he likes it! And look at me, what *I* stand for!"

"That's right," said Roy. "I've seen the kid stand for a lot sitting down. That's how he got those freckles on his nose."

"What's that got to do with the freckles on my nose?" Pee-wee roared back at Roy. "How did I get the freckles on my nose, huh?"

"From eating rusty raisins—ask me another," Roy laughed.

There was a shout of laughter and while it was echoing and re-echoing around the lake, Spiffy watched Addison. "Gee, I wouldn't let anyone get my goat," he said to the boy. "Pee-wee gets mad and all, but he doesn't mean it—it only makes more fun and that's why it keeps up. It's because you get mad and stay mad that Roy does it all the more. Even he's started teasing me about being Mr. Temple's pet and I don't get sore—I just laugh back."

"What does he mean, you're Mr. Temple's pet?" Addison asked.

"Aw, he's only trying to get my goat about that, that's all," Spiffy answered. "Mr. Temple has been very good to me and he sent me here this summer because I haven't anyone —exactly."

Addison Upp stared at his competitor. "You mean Mr. Temple is paying your way

here all summer? he asked incredulously.

Spiffy nodded. "Gee, that isn't anything to get so excited about. Mr. Temple's paid the way for lots of fellers. Even he helped Tom Slade."

"Yeh, I know. But that's different," Addison said. "Tom Slade never cared much about swimmin'."

There was an inference to be drawn from that remark of Addison's. It did not occur to Spiffy until he was dressing in his cabin a few minutes later. And the more he thought about it the more he was puzzled. He told Warde.

Warde threw back his head and laughed heartily. "That sounds like him, all right," he said. "Leave it to him to hatch up something like that just because he can see you're a fine swimmer."

"What do you mean—hatch up something?" Spiffy asked.

"Can't you see!" Warde exclaimed. "He thinks that if Mr. Temple sent you here you must have a pull and that you'll be favored in the race on account of it."

Spiffy's face clouded. "Gee, I don't like that," he said. "If I did win he'd say that was why, wouldn't he?"

"Sure," laughed Warde. "But do you think there's anybody in camp that would listen to him? Nah. They're all on to him."

"He complained because he was born," Roy chimed in. "He cried for three days so what can you expect now? If you win the race he'll complain to the judges that it isn't fair because the tide was running the wrong way. Addison invented the rainy Saturday at camp just so he'd have everybody under one roof to hear him whine."

Spiffy smiled. "Gee, I'd rather not win if I had to hear about it from him the rest of the summer," he said listlessly.

"That's just why you've *got* to win!" Warde said. "Isn't that right, fellers?"

"*Sure!*" came the answer.

"We live up to a scout being brother to every other scout, all right," Westy said. "And we've been doing it right along with Addison—but even Mr. Ellsworth said a little defeat

would do him good. He's had everything his own way just because he's such a crackerjack scout and swimmer but now we've got you to put up against him. It's going to be a test whether the grouch or the smile wins."

"The smile wins every time," Roy grinned. "I can prove it by me."

Spiffy was carried away for the moment with the trust and confidence that his patrol had placed in him. But when the shouting died down and he was left alone the memory of Addison's biting words cut into his mind like the keen edge of a blade.

CHAPTER XIX

SHADOW

Spiffy came off with flying colors in the contest that next day and at supper in the eats shack he and the fourteen other victorious contestants were given three rousing cheers. Addison Upp was among the fourteen.

That serious young boy took it all as a matter of course and in passing out he managed to get near the pleased and smiling Spiffy. "I can see you're getting a swell head a'ready," he whispered. "To win the eliminations isn't so awful much. It's the finals that count—*don't forget that!*"

That announcement had a little chilling effect in the midst of so much gayety, but Spiffy smiled off the feeling. "Gee, don't worry, Add," he said good-naturedly, "I'm not forgetting anything when it comes to that. And another thing—there's thirteen other fellers

besides you and me and they can swim as good as us or they wouldn't have won either! So does that look as if I'm forgetting what counts and getting a swell head?"

Addison gave a queer, twisted smile in answer to the question and passed out with his patrol into the early summer evening. Warde Hollister shrugged his shoulders disgustedly. "Gosh, that bird is the original joy killer!" he exclaimed. "What gets my goat is why he's picking on Spiff!"

Spiffy shook his head. "I don't know except that he thought Tom Slade was backing me. He's got an idea about Mr. Temple too and it makes him mad at me, I think."

"Let him then," said Westy Martin. "If he wants to act like a girl we'll treat him like one. And as for Tom Slade—he *is* backing you. He's picked you for a winner and so have we!"

The Silver Foxes then did some cheering on their own account and a little later Spiffy was glad to escape the noise and warmth of indoors. He stepped off the broad, rustic porch smiling, for he had left his whole patrol watching Pee-

wee Harris attack a third portion of dessert.

He wandered into the dusk and down toward the boat landing feeling strangely exultant. Through the lengthening shadows he saw the familiar figure of his uncle and was surprised to find that it brought him no feeling of dread as heretofore. Perhaps it was because he had been picked a winner and had the confidence and respect of those whom he most cared about.

At any rate he went forward to where Bill Riker was standing. It was the first time he had been alone with the man since that day of discovery.

"Did you hear I got picked for the lake race, Uncle Bill?" he asked joyfully.

Riker nodded his head. "I watched yuh to-day," he said, a trifle bitterly. "Now I suppose you're happy, traipsin' aroun' with nothin' to do while your poor old uncle is workin' like a dawg."

Spiffy took in the lazy, slouched posture of his relative and decided not to let himself get angry. "Mr. Hollister said I wasn't fit to work

this summer," he defended himself. "He said I was undernourished and everything, but I've got to work this fall and go to night school besides, so I might as well have a little fun now. Anyway, training for a race like this one is going to be isn't so easy as you think."

"It's play compared to the way I have to work every day," Bill Riker complained.

Spiffy shook his head in a gesture of hopelessness. "Well, isn't that better than being a thief and going to jail and being disgraced?" he asked irritably. "Gee, didn't I go and get Tom Slade to give you more work so's you could go back to Aunt Kate with some decent money?"

Like most men of his kind, the mention of jail had a disquieting effect upon Riker. He hated even the slightest reference to it and sought refuge in shifting the blame to the man whom he had wronged. "It's men like Mr. Temple that makes a thief out o' an honest man. Didn't he half pay me for a job?"

"You didn't finish it," Spiffy said quietly. "That's why you didn't get all your money.

You wouldn't pay a man for half a job if you were in Mr. Temple's place, either."

"Who told you that?" Bill demanded angrily.

The boy peered through the dusk to see if anyone was within earshot. "I heard it myself through Mr. Temple's gardener," he answered softly. "You can't say it isn't true because I once heard Aunt Kate say that you always did that with people and then talked about them because they wouldn't give you your full price. Anyway, that's got nothing to do with us now. As long as Mr. Temple gets his silver back I don't care."

"He don't deserve it back if he's blabbered aroun' about me," the man whined resentfully.

"It's because you're guilty that you say that," Spiffy said bravely. "Only you got to admit that Mr. Temple's been nice to me even though you did owe him money for rent and things like that."

"I don't have to admit anything," the man said, glowering upon his well meaning nephew. " 'N' I don't have to have a snip o' a kid like

you tell me either. I'm sick o' Mr. Temple's kind and you too!"

He walked away a few feet and then came shambling back. "I'll tell yuh one thing," he said threateningly. "If it wasn't that them initials of Mr. Temple's was on that stuff you wouldn' o' seen me 'roun' these parts. I couldn' get regular money on accoun' o' that and I thought I might as well hold on to it as long as I went to the trouble o' takin' it—see!"

"Then you lied to me, huh?" Spiffy demanded, his anger increasing every second. "Then you lied about not being able to sell the silver on account of it being on your conscience, huh?"

His uncle was instantly cowed. He recognized the strength of Spiffy's character and knew it was something more than he had ever reckoned with. Clumsily he put his hand on the boy's shoulder. "You mustn' get so het up over things, Arnold," he said trying to placate him. "I told yuh I was going to give Mr. Temple his stuff back, didn't I? I just said that before 'cause I was hoppin' mad to think

that man has everything and I ain't got nothin'. But I'll give him his stuff back just like I promised you. Then I'm a-goin' away quick!"

He shuffled silently over the rough boards and disappeared into the darkness. Spiffy stood as if rooted to the spot and suddenly something rose out of the shadows and hurried along directly in his uncle's footsteps.

Spiffy knew that he ought to run—see who it was, but he seemed unable to move. He could only stand and wonder.

CHAPTER XX

LIES

By the time he had sufficiently recovered from the shock, all sound of footfalls on the rough boards had ceased. He started back, moving cautiously and listening intently but the loud beating of his frightened heart seemed to drown out every other sound.

He got back on shore without encountering a single soul and saw the first sparks of campfire shooting heavenward like so many tiny rockets. At sight of it the thought flashed across his mind that whoever the eavesdropper had been he was sure to encounter him there.

But how?

He smiled ironically in the darkness at the question that he had put to himself. How could he detect the one face out of so many? He knew it was absurd to think of and yet he dared hope that the friendly glow of the huge fire

would throw some light on the darkening fear that was already beginning to take shape in his mind.

How much had the listener heard?

The thought pounded at his brain as he came within the outer circle of the group. He looked anxiously at each face trying to penetrate the knowledge they must surely have against him. But it was a futile search; some were laughing, some sober and a good many indifferent.

In desperation he stepped carefully toward his own patrol who as usual occupied the inner circle nearest the fire. That was so Roy Blakeley could kid Pee-wee without any interference and eat his toasted marshmallows at the same time. Warde Hollister had once said that that was the origin of outdoor sports.

Spiffy took his place among them and tried bravely to take part in their nonsense. At one moment he thought that the eavesdropper must be Westy Martin and the next moment he was sure it was Bad Manners. Then he caught Warde looking at him—he thought, soberly.

It shocked him—so much so that he decided to make a brave plunge and get it over with. He nodded at Warde and squirmed over to his side. "Did—did you just get here, Warde?" he asked with a precision alien to himself.

Warde looked at him wonderingly. "You mean just before you?" he returned.

Spiffy nodded and his cheeks burned.

"Nah," answered Warde. "I helped start the fire. Why d'ye want to know?"

"Aw, I don't know," Spiffy answered with an affected nonchalance. "I was just wondering, I guess."

"Oh," said Warde indifferently.

Spiffy breathed a little more freely. It wasn't Warde, after all! He must try to find out just who it was.

For a few short seconds he sat still listening to fragments of yarns and the usual campfire talk. It seemed an hour to him so he nudged Warde once more. "Say, Warde," he said, "did any of our fellers get here just before me?"

Warde stared at him. "Not that I know of

—why?" Then before Spiffy could answer: "Come to think of it we all helped build the fire tonight—all except you. Where were you?"

Spiffy bit his lip and thought hard. "It's likely to all come out—you better be careful!" his inner voice whispered. But to Warde he said: "Oh-a-a-I was just walking around—around the lake. That's all."

"Oh," said Warde, with a finality that left no doubt in Spiffy's mind. "You should have been here—Roy sure did have the kid's goat."

Spiffy felt like shouting with joy—it wasn't any of his patrol after all. And they were the only ones that really mattered. It would have been difficult for anyone else to recognize his voice in the dusk. "Besides I didn't talk out loud," he said under his breath during a tumult of laughter around the camp fire. "I fairly whispered to Uncle Bill—I'm sure I did."

He made up his mind then and there that the matter was settled. He decided to be more discreet in his future talks at the boat landing; either that or avoid his uncle as much as pos-

sible. By the time they were ready to turn in he had fully resolved to stick to the latter course.

Somehow the evening's incident would not stay put in the oblivion corner of Spiffy's mind. Time and again, it came bobbing up and quite ruthlessly did he cram it back. He just would not let it annoy him and spoil the glory of his day just passed and perhaps the glory of a day to come.

He and Warde were strolling along toward their cabin when the rebellious thought came forcefully back to him. And unconsciously he absorbed it and went over each word that his uncle had uttered in the unseen listener's presence. The whole thing was incriminating enough but the fact that the guilty man recanted his story of the theft left no loophole for the miserable boy to jump through in the event that he was exposed.

His uncle's shame was his and doubly so because he had thus far shielded him since he had known the full truth. But how could any of them know, especially the eavesdropper,

why, he, Spiffy Henshaw, was shielding his relative from the penalty of theft. They did not know of his Aunt Kate, good and kind and honest, who had gone through so much already—it was she he was shielding, and besides hadn't Mr. Hollister said that they ought to give a man like that a chance to make good?

Loyalty—that was the answer that burned in Spiffy's mind. He had to be loyal, no matter what, and he was trying to do it in the way he saw best. To Mr. Temple he was showing it by striving for the race. And to his worthless uncle—he was giving him the benefit of the doubt in accordance with Mr. Hollister's views; and in another week the stolen property would be safely returned. It seemed to the distracted boy that he had evened up the score.

"Say, what makes you so gosh-awful quiet to-night?" Warde asked, breaking in upon his musing.

"What—what's making me quiet?" he returned stammering. "Gee—oh, I don't know. Maybe I'm sleepy or something—anyway, I guess that's it."

Warde laughed. They were right outside of their cabin and a figure rustled past them and down toward the boat landing. His uncle. Again! Would he never stop going back and forth from there? Spiffy pretended not to notice who had passed.

"That's old hobo, Captain," said Warde. "He seems to be a queer old bird—never speaks or anything. What I've seen of him reminds me of something or someone—I don't know where. Guess it's because he looks like the typical hobo you see in the movies, huh?"

"I guess so," Spiffy answered half-heartedly.

"Say, you mad or something, Spiff?" Warde asked quickly.

Spiffy moistened his lips. "Me mad? Nah. Gee, what would I be mad for?" he answered carelessly.

"That's what I thought," Warde said. "When you said you'd been walking around the lake I thought maybe you were mad and wanted to be alone."

"Nah," Spiffy said quietly. "If I was mad

at all it was at myself but, gee whiz, not at you, Warde. Gosh, no."

A little later he was staring blankly from the confines of his comfortable bunk into the darkness. "On account of Uncle Bill I had to lie to Warde tonight," he whispered into his pillow. "Gee, it's no fair that I have to lie to my best friend on account of him—*gosh!* I suppose some guys wouldn't mind telling a little lie like that but I don't know—anyhow, why did Uncle Bill have to come here? Now I'll have to explain to Warde some day about that lie—gosh!"

It was indeed true that most boys "would not have minded telling a little lie like that," but then neither would they have any conscience where the Uncle Bills of this world are concerned. Loyalty is not often thought of in the terms that Spiffy thought of it.

But then Spiffy and loyalty seemed to go together.

CHAPTER XXI

SUSPICION

Spiffy came away from the eats shack next morning feeling as blithesome as a bird. A sense of peace pervaded his soul, for breakfast had been a time of delight. Not one unfriendly glance had he encountered in all those faces, not one word of condemnation or suspicion.

He walked to his cabin and Warde followed right behind him. "Well, what's doing, Spiff?" he asked. "You can't swim and practice on top of pancakes, kid."

"Boy, I know it," he answered happily. "I'm going to wait till about ten o'clock and then see what other way I can find to beat my friend Addison."

"Your friend Addison won't bother you this morning, Spiff," Westy said as he came in the door after them. "He's gone down to Catskill

on a very important errand he told me. I met him just as I was going in the eats shack for breakfast. He'd had his early, he said, because he had to go down as soon as he could get there."

"Oh, boy, you should have seen him!" Bad Manners interposed with his head just inside of the door. "He was all dolled up and he acted as mysterious as anything, but he never let on what it was all about, did he, Wes?"

"No," Westy answered. "He gives me a big pain."

"Just think what his mother has to suffer," Roy added as the full patrol all pushed in at once. "We only have to look at him for two months but she has to put up with him the rest of the year. If I could spare my sympathy I'd give her some but Pee-wee needs all I've got."

"What do I need, huh?" Pee-wee yelled as he passed under the window. "I heard you mention my name—don't think I didn't!" He strode through the doorway like some conquering hero.

"Atta kid," said Roy, in his inimitable way.

"I was just telling the gang that you need all the sympathy I've got and that's the reason why I haven't got any left over to give to Mrs. Upp."

Pee-wee frowned. "What's got into you, huh?" he demanded. "What's the matter with me that you got to give me sympathy?"

"Haven't I been asking you every day what two junk men can find to talk about?" Roy asked soberly. "And have you been able to answer me yet?"

"Do you think I haven't something better to do than answer your fool questions when there's something else more . . ."

"Listen, period!" Roy said in a pleading tone. "One question after another. Then you can tell us what's causing your appetite to fall away."

Pee-wee scowled. "All right then," he shouted. "You're so smart I've asked everybody—even Mr. Ellsworth and he don't know even, so I bet you don't know yourself."

"I didn't say I did—did I?" Roy returned. "I asked a couple of them one time—they

come to our house and collect newspapers and the one feller told me they just talk about rubbish. So I said, who'd a thunk it!"

"Say, listen!" roared Pee-wee in the midst of the laughter. "This ain't . . ."

"*Isn't* is preferred . . ." Roy began.

"Shut up!" Pee-wee screamed. "*Isn't,* then! Well, anyhow, this isn't any time to be hollering and laughing like fools at Roy's nonsensical jokes and things. There's something serious happened and I'm not supposed to know it—neither is the feller that told me."

"Aha! Aha!" Roy said. "Now the kid's in his glory. There's something mysterious in yonder wood."

"Will you listen!" Pee-wee roared. "It's a secret—even I'm not supposed to know it."

"Then what do you expect us to do?" Roy asked.

Pee-wee gave him a withering glance and continued. "I walked up to the bulletin board and there was a feller standing there that belongs to Addison Upp's patrol and before I could say anything Tom Slade came out of

Administration Shack and walked away without speaking to me like as if he was puzzled."

"I'd be puzzled how to do that, too," said Roy. "There's a trick in it—I'll ask him."

Pee-wee concentrated his attention upon Spiffy who was listening intently. "I'll just tell you," the kid went on. "After Tom went away like I was saying before, that feller told me he heard something he wasn't supposed to hear because they were talking loud and he was right there by the bulletin board. Anyway, it came out that somebody walked right in Tom Slade's cabin last night and stole twenty-five dollars out of his pocket!"

There was a noticeable hush at that announcement. Theft was something unknown and unheard of in Temple Camp. And for Tom Slade to have been the victim seemed to make it a twofold crime. Each one instantly resolved to hunt out the offender.

"I knew you'd all be surprised," Pee-wee boomed. "And that feller heard that if it wasn't that Tom had put the rest of his money in another place why he would have had over

a hundred dollars stolen. He was kind of restless, Tom said to Mr. Wainwright in Administration Shack—he said it must have been the thief that woke him up, sort of, but he didn't know it until this morning. Anyway, it was lucky that he was restless because maybe the feller might have stolen more—gee whiz!"

Pee-wee's secret left them quietly wondering. Warde seemed to be the first to find his voice. "Here we're all thinking that it might be this one or that and maybe it isn't at all," he said. "Jiminy, there isn't anything to prevent an outsider from getting in here at night and doing it, is there?"

"That's right," Westy agreed. "I like to think that it's that way, anyhow. It would be awful to think of our fellers doing it—especially from Tom Slade."

Spiffy said nothing but he felt it worse than any of them. Tom had been so ready to accept him as he found him and the thought of anyone wronging his friend and champion wronged him also.

The pleasure of his training hour was spoiled

and at lunch the eats shack fairly seethed with the startling "secret." In short, the whole camp seemed to bear that air of knowing nothing while knowing everything. And Tom Slade went about as if he had gained twenty-five dollars instead of losing it.

And thus the day wore away and night came once more. No one knew what had been done about the crime—no one knew that anything would be done about it. Spiffy sought out his scoutmaster purposely to see if he would say anything but he was sadly disappointed and with a feeling of disgust he turned in with his patrol about half past nine o'clock.

"Well, this is the end of an imperfect day," Warde remarked from his bunk. "What's the idea, I wonder, of keeping the thing so quiet? Gosh, if Administration Shack would come out with it and let us fellers do something we wouldn't be going to bed feeling like this."

"Maybe—maybe they suspect who it is," Spiffy suggested. "Maybe they're only waiting their time until they're sure."

"That's true," said Warde. "But gosh, I'd

sure like to know who it is. You bet I'd be absolutely through with a feller like that—especially because they did it to Tom."

"So would I!" Spiffy said meaningly. "Gosh, he's been nice to me since I've been here."

"He's been nice to everybody," Westy said sleepily. "That's why I'm anxious to see the thief go to jail for the rest of his life—he deserves it."

They were all anxious, and led by Roy they made a solemn resolve to hunt out the offender on their own initiative if possible. Spiffy's quiet voice bravely joined in but his nerves were tingling and his heart beat terribly fast.

He had sworn to hunt out the malefactor. Suppose he was the one to find him? Suppose . . . He dared not complete the thought. He was too afraid, too sure that his suspicions might be well founded.

Sleep was almost impossible in that frame of mind. He tossed and turned hour upon hour until Mr. Wainwright's clock in Administration Shack boomed forth twelve times. He

sat up then and told himself that if he would go and find out perhaps his suspicions would turn out to be idle fancy after all.

He did not bother to dress but walked cautiously on tiptoe to the door and outside. There he looked about, up and down and all around and felt assured that everything was quiet. Then he glanced toward the boat landing and prayerfully hoped that his uncle would be there.

It was a clear, starry sky that helped him to find his way along and he felt thankful for just that much light. The moon would be a little more than he desired because the lean, bent figure of his uncle sitting on one of the spiles could not be seen until after he had gotten halfway down the boat landing.

The man did not hear him or see him until he was standing right at his side. Then he jumped, startled at the white, bare-foot figure.

"Whew!" he exclaimed softly. "You did give me a scare, Arnold. Now what in Sam Hill are you a-doin' down here at this hour?"

"Talk low, Uncle Bill," Spiffy said in a

whisper. "I'm not taking any more chances because someone was here on this landing the other night when you and me were talking."

"Lan' sakes!" the man said. "Who'd you think 'twas?"

"That's what I don't know—I can't find out," the boy answered. "Gee, and it's worried me—I can tell you that! You shouldn't have said what you did because it gave you away and maybe it'll go against me if it ever comes out. And I got so many that's trusting in me now—it'd be awful. Specially because I ain't done nothing wrong that I know of. It's only on account of Aunt Kate that I asked Tom to keep you on and another thing I wanted to give you a chance like Mr. Hollister said I should."

"G'long now," Bill Riker said, trying to make his words sound comforting. "Mebbe you just imagined you heard someone—mebbe you're all wrong. Anyway, I don't see there's so much to worry about. They couldn't see us in the dark, anyway."

"No, I know it," Spiffy said. "But they

could recognize me by my voice—that is, if they knew me."

"Well, if you ain't heard nothing about it yet, I guess it's safe, all right," the man said in his lazy way. "'Nother thing, no one knows where that stuff is 'ceptin' you and me. They can't prove nothing—no one can." He fumbled in his pockets and drew out a long, black cigar and lighted it.

"Gee, be careful, Uncle Bill!" Spiffy warned him quietly. "Keep your back turned toward shore so if anyone happened to get up they wouldn't see the light."

"Just as you say, Arnold," Bill said complacently. "Anyway, this camp don't worry me much. Soon's your friend Mr. Temple gets here I'm a-goin' ter move along. I got a little somethin' ter do it with now—yes sir!"

Spiffy peered at him sharply. "Uncle—Uncle Bill!" he whispered. "Do you—do—what do you know about Tom Slade being robbed, huh?"

Riker turned completely around on the spile.

"Huh? What's 'at 'bout him being robbed—how's it you know, huh?" he asked breathlessly.

The tell-tale squeak of a loose board sounded somewhere near them.

CHAPTER XXII

DISCOVERY

Spiffy was panicky for the moment. Frantically he gazed at his uncle. "You ain't seen me here at all—understand?" he said, hardly moving his lips.

Without another word he turned and slid noiselessly into the water just between two canoes that were tied fast to the landing. When he came up he swam quietly around the one trim craft and let the stern hide him.

Soon he heard a voice talking to his uncle. "Didn't I hear someone talking down here when I came along?" it asked.

Spiffy's heart seemed to stop for a few terrifying seconds. It was Addison Upp.

Bill Riker did not answer at once but at length he said, "Eh?"

"I said I heard someone talking when I came along," he said definitely.

"Me, I guess," Bill Riker said tersely. "Do that sometimes."

"Nah, it wasn't you," the boy said in his sulky way. "I'm sure it sounded like Spiffy Henshaw—*that Silver Fox!*"

Spiffy's body seemed to turn to ice in the cold water. He grasped the stern of the canoe to keep his hands warm for his heart beating as hard as it was chilled his blood if anything. He felt that he dare not breathe.

So Addison Upp had recognized his voice!

"Gee, it's funny how I thought it was Spiffy," Addison persisted.

Bill Riker puffed at his cigar but did not speak. Spiffy trembled and his teeth began to chatter. He tried breathing long deep breaths to get his blood in circulation but it made the canoe bob awkardly in his grasp.

"Do you know Spiffy?" Addison kept on insistently.

The cigar smoke wafted out over the lake. "Know lots of the kids," Bill Riker answered evasively.

"That's not answering the question I asked

you,'' said Addison, remarkably tenacious.

Spiffy tried to force his teeth together for a few seconds that he might listen. Then his uncle cleared his throat. ''You're a pretty fresh kid,'' he said to Addison.

''Just because I want to know something, huh?'' Addison came back pertly. ''You and him know more about each other than you want to let on—don't I know that!''

Spiffy's hand slipped off the stern in his dismay and caused the canoe to bump against one of the landing's supports. He had not time to duck before Addison was standing at the edge and staring straight down upon his unfortunate head.

''Ha, ha!'' laughed Addison softly. ''That's a hot one, all right—you hiding in the water because you're afraid of me!''

Spiffy did not know which he felt the most, chagrin or shame. But he bravely tried to raise his head. ''I'm not afraid of you, Addison, and you know I'm not,'' he said quietly and pulled himself out of the cold water and up onto the boat landing, teeth chattering and his whole

body quivering. "I had a reason for doing that and it wasn't hiding exactly—it was sort of for somebody else I was doing it."

Addison snickered audibly. "Well, you tell it pretty good, anyway," he said meaningly. "Do you think I care who you were doing it for?" Then: "Maybe there'd be somebody in Administration Shack who'd care though."

Spiffy, cold and miserable as he felt, was instantly fired by the cowardly remark. "So that's the kind of a feller you are, huh?" he flung out.

"It's a scout's duty to report things like that, isn't it?" Addison came back, a little less sure of himself.

"Not the way you meant to do it," Spiffy said coldly. "I wouldn't want to be a scout if I thought they meant that way. They don't want to make a lot of tattle tales out of fellers, I know that!"

Bill Riker sat like a statue except for an occasional puff of his cigar.

"What were you doing in that water then and why was that man afraid to tell me you

were here?" Addison demanded as if that were incriminating enough in itself.

"That's our business," Spiffy answered, defiantly. "I can't tell you on account of someone else I got to be loyal to."

"And I got to be loyal to the scouts," Addison returned.

"Yeh, you have," Spiffy sneered. "You know you ain't telling the truth. You know it's because you're afraid of me in the race—you know it! You wanted to keep me out and that's the only reason you're going to tell that you found me in the water—you think it'll disqualify me and it will!"

Addison winced noticeably. "I didn't say I was *going* to, did I?" he asked. "I just said it was a scout's duty."

Spiffy held his head up high, his night clothes clinging to his slim body and the icy water trickling down over his bare feet. "Anyhow, I don't care what you say," he said grimly. "I won't give you the chance to disqualify me—I'll go and tell Tom Slade right now that I disobeyed the rule. I don't need to tell anything

else—that'll give me enough of a black eye."

"I'm not going to tell," said Addison, evidently remorseful. "You don't have to go to Tom Slade or anybody—I won't tell. Even what I heard the other night—I won't tell them here, honest!"

Spiffy winced and looked fearfully toward his uncle who was now standing. He shook his head pleadingly at his nephew.

"I don't know how much you heard the other night," Spiffy said with convincing frankness. "But there's one thing—I'm honest. I never stole in my life and I can say that and whatever's happened is going to be all right again. It's only on account of that lady—my aunt, and I thought I got to be loyal to her. But one thing I know now, I should have told someone straight off, like Tom Slade, or written to Mr. Temple. Anyway, it's too late now—I know that. Soon's Mr. Temple comes it'll be all right so if you say you won't say anything more I'll stay out of the race—not because I'm afraid you'll tell but like a punishment for myself for not telling right away. Then Tom and

Mr. Temple and my patrol even will be disgusted with me for backing out and that'll hurt worse than anything."

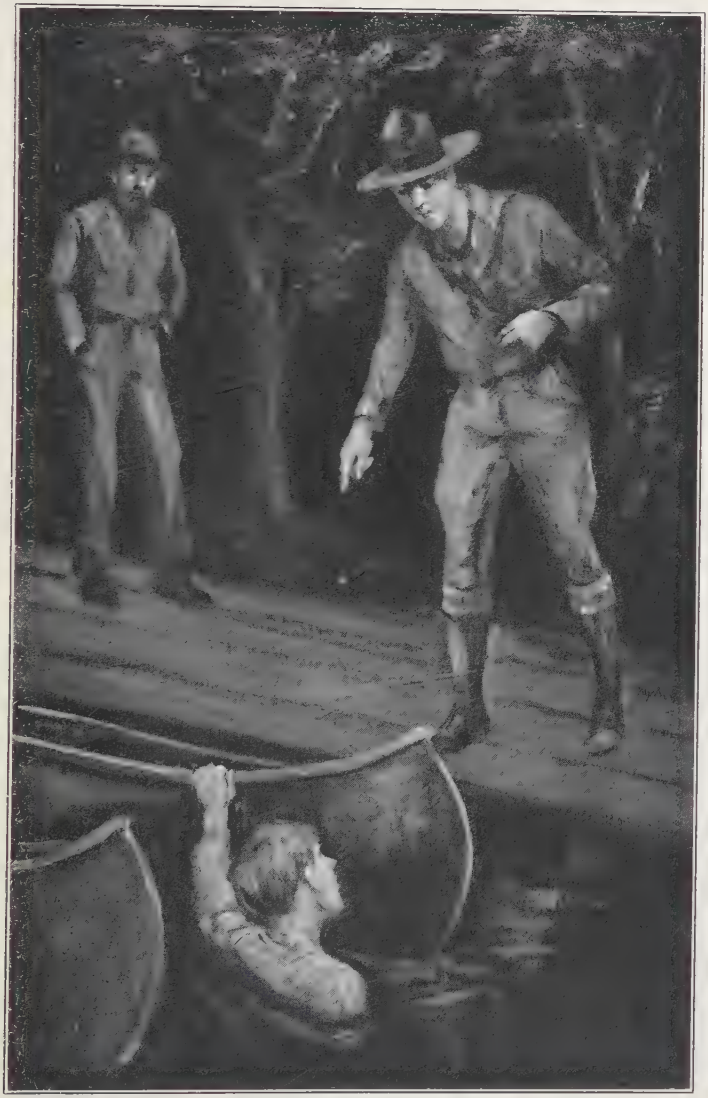
"You don't have to," said Addison contritely. "Even now I wouldn't tell—even if you beat me in the race!"

"Don't I know it!" Spiffy said. "I'm doing this on my own hook now because just since we've been talking here I found out for myself that I've been a sort of coward like. I've been worse than my uncle in a way because I should have told Mr. Temple or Tom right away—that was the right thing to do."

Addison's stubborn scowl had softened considerably in the last few minutes of Spiffy's recital. "Well, anyway, you don't have to stay out," he said quietly.

Spiffy seemed determined and said nothing, and a few seconds after Addison had gone he turned to his uncle who looked as if he had been considerably frightened. "Well, didn't I fix it for you on account of Aunt Kate?" the boy asked him with quivering lips.

Bill Riker nodded. "How d'ye spose that



HE SWAM QUIETLY AROUND ONE TRIM CRAFT AND LET THE STERN HIDE HIM.

Spiffy Henshaw. *Page* 172

fresh kid got on to me, huh?'' he questioned.

''He had the knife in me, kind of,'' Spiffy answered pensively. ''That's what he came for tonight but he's sorry now, you can see. Anyway, I'll be glad when Mr. Temple comes and then I can tell him the whole story. I'm only sorry that the race isn't until after I could have a chance to tell him—gee whiz!''

Riker seemed not to hear the boy at all. He was listening intently to Addison's retreating footfalls. ''Hmph!'' he said as the sound died away. ''D'ye think he's likely to tell, anyway, or not?''

''No, he's that much of a scout that he won't —I know it,'' said Spiffy.

''A'right then,'' the man said complacently. ''Yer better git along to bed 'fore anyone else comes along and finds out what's what between us. One's enough as 'tis.''

Spiffy remembered then that his wet clothes were chilling his body more and more. He folded his arms about himself and ran lightly to his cabin. Just as he was about to step in-

side the door, Tom Slade came around from the side of the building. Spiffy stopped short.

"Is that you, Spiff?" Tom asked in a whisper.

Poor Spiffy wondered what would happen next. "Yeh," he answered. "I'm—I'm disqualified for the race, Tom—I am."

"Who told you so?" Tom asked him amusedly.

"I—I did," he answered. "I've been in the lake—just now."

"I'd never have known it if you hadn't told me," Tom said with a humorous little twist of his mouth. "You better get dry clothes on or you'll get cold."

"I—a—Addison. . . ." Spiffy began.

"I know," Tom interposed. "I just saw him. He said you and he were holding a sort of powwow on the boat landing. Now get to bed!"

Spiffy went inside obediently, changed into dry clothes and crawled into his bunk. But all the time he was wondering why Tom had not bawled him out for breaking a rule.

CHAPTER XXIII

SELF-PUNISHMENT

Before Spiffy had breakfast the next morning, Tom dropped into the cabin and handed him a telegram. That alone was event enough in his life but when he opened it and saw the name of John Temple signed to it he felt that things were certainly happening to him in rapid succession.

Tom laughed as he watched the changing expression upon his face. "Now what?" the young assistant camp manager inquired. "Has Mr. Temple appointed you to take charge of his railroads or something?"

"Nope," answered Spiffy, smiling wistfully. "Read it—Tom. I—I can't talk about it for some reason."

Tom took the telegram from him, smoothed it out, and read:

To—Arnold Henshaw,
Care Temple Camp, Black Lake,
Catskill, N. Y.
Hear you are in line for the Rhodes
Award. This is to tell you I am
picking you now.
John Temple.

"Well, what's the matter with it?" Tom smiled. "J. T. must have a crush on you kiddo. He's never sent any telegrams like that to me."

"Nor to me," Roy said, affecting great sorrow.

"Let's all cry," said Warde. "None of us ever got any from him, did we?"

No one had and after the wave of grief had passed Tom handed the yellow slip of paper back to the boy. "Why can't you talk about it, kiddo?" he asked.

"Becase it's just my luck to have Mr. Temple put such trust in me now that I can't go in the race," he announced listlessly.

"Can't go in the race?" they all chorused.

Spiffy nodded sadly.

"You're kiddin'!" said Warde.

Spiffy shook his head. "Nope, I'm not."

"What's the reason?" Westy asked.

"I can't tell till after the race," poor Spiffy said. "Gee, I'd like to—you can imagine. But I can't—in a way it's my own fault."

For the next few minutes they took turns in pleading and coaxing but they got no more satisfaction than if they had not spoken. Tom stood looking on silently and he seemed to be studying the boy.

"Well, I'm going to breakfast," Bad Manners announced. "After all, Spiffy isn't a baby—we can't go on coaxing him all day."

"No, and when a feller gets the chance to try for the Rhodes Award and won't take it that's his own funeral," said Westy.

Warde looked too disappointed to speak.

"Once I thought we were going to have another Eagle Scout and now I think we won't," said Roy without any trace of his usual banter.

"Jiminy, it's beyond me!" Warde said hopelessly. "I can't make it out at all."

Spiffy looked at his friend as if to plead for patience. But Warde didn't look his way. He

walked out to breakfast also. Soon the cabin was empty save for Tom.

"There's lots of things a feller can't always talk about," Spiffy said, feeling desperate.

"I know there are, kiddo," said Tom kindly. "But I think you're making too much of a small matter, aren't you?"

"Did—did Addison tell you anything?" Spiffy asked, startled.

Tom shook his head smilingly. "No, he didn't, kiddo. He didn't say anything more than I told you last night but I suspected a lot. Addison's got something to do with your decision, hasn't he?"

Spiffy nodded. "At first he did but afterward he didn't. I figured out for myself I was disqualified on account of something I've done. Doesn't the rules of trying for the Rhodes Award say that no scout can qualify for the race unless he's obeyed every rule of his camp as well as the scout laws?"

Tom nodded. "That's what," he said.

"Well, I've broken some of them," Spiffy said, without trying to spare himself at all. "I

didn't do it intentionally at first, but I did it so that's what I have to think of. Anyhow, maybe I'll be able to try next year—if I'm here."

"You'll be here," Tom smiled. "But what counts is the present and I've been banking on you."

Spiffy looked out of the window toward the lake. He wondered if Tom could know how much he had been banking on it himself. Then he smiled ruefully. "Gee, though," he said, "you'd think Addison and me were the only fellers in the race. Maybe neither one of us would win."

"Maybe not," said Tom. "But there's one thing about you, Spiff—you have the will to do things, the spirit. And you're a pretty fine swimmer. I've watched you."

Each word of Tom's made it the harder for him to bear. But he shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I've got to go through with it now—it's settled."

"I'm not bothering to ask you questions," Tom said, "because I think it's something per-

sonal. But I'd like to bet that if I knew your argument I could shoot it full of holes."

Spiffy smiled. He knew what Tom would do to his uncle—the weak, lazy, selfish man that he was. Spiffy knew what *he'd* do too. But then after all Bill Ricker occupied only a small center of the stage. It was really Aunt Kate. . . .

CHAPTER XXIV

THE RACE

During the following days the boy seemed to alienate himself from his patrol. None of them had spoken of the matter again but he was quick to detect their keen disappointment and as he had nothing to offer them now he stayed out of their way.

But with Addison Upp he had found a new friendship and when the day of the race came they were to be seen together from breakfast until noon. The great event was not to take place until two o'clock.

"You still have time to think it over," Addison said to him just before they went in for lunch. "I can't see what your uncle has to do with you, anyhow. No matter what he did."

"It's not him, Add," said Spiffy, "that's what I can't tell the fellers. It's because I didn't write to Mr. Temple about it right away.

That's what makes me feel so bad—to think I didn't do that. I know I was thinking about Aunt Kate then but I should have known that Mr. Temple would have even let Uncle Bill off then if I had only said something. But I sort of felt more sorry for him than I did for Mr. Temple. I know I did."

Addison hesitated a little. "Well, you'll see him today, Spiff, and before he comes I just want to tell you something. I—I sent him a telegram that morning after I heard you and your uncle on the boat landing—the first morning I mean. I didn't know what kind of a feller you were then so I told him how I heard you call that bearded man uncle and that you asked him why he lied to you about the silver. Now I bet you'll be sore at me."

Spiffy drew a long, deep breath. "No, I'm not," he said. "I'm kind of glad in a way. Now he knows, and as long as you told him I said that he'll guess that I thought Uncle Bill was innocent. Don't you think so?"

"Gosh, I hope so," Addison said. "I feel as if the whole thing's my fault now, but that

night I thought you were a couple of crooks. Do you think that wasn't fair for me to send that telegram to him?"

"No," Spiffy answered. "I'd have done the same thing, if I thought anyone stole from Mr. Temple. Gee whiz, Pee-wee Harris would have hiked down to Catskill that night and sent it."

They both laughed.

"I think Tom has a hunch that Captain is something to you," Addison said thoughtfully. "He must have seen him down on the landing that night after he talked to you and me. I told him we were down there."

"I know you did," said Spiffy. "Another thing, we've not heard any more about that twenty-five dollars that was stolen."

"Your uncle?"

"Gee, I hate to think so, Add, but it's funny how quick that died down after that night Tom saw us."

"Yeh," Addison agreed. "That's what I've been thinking."

After lunch the sun went scurrying under some dark clouds and a damp breeze blew out

of the eastern skies. There was a general air of activity in the camp and everyone seemed bent on some purpose or other. All except Spiffy.

He had never felt so idle in all his life. The minutes seemed to drag by and there was nothing for him to do but walk around and watch the others. No one was paying any attention to him.

In the midst of his loneliness Tom's voice hailed him cheerfully. "Hey there, kiddo!" he called.

Spiffy turned around with beating heart. It was good to see Tom just then. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"Good news," said Tom, taking long strides toward him. "I think you'll think so, at any rate."

"Gee, I hope so," Spiffy said wistfully.

"Well, Mr. Temple won't be here until about four o'clock," said Tom mysteriously. "He's had some business to attend to. He'll get here just in time to pin the medal on . . ."

"Someone," Spiffy interposed. "But not

me. Why did you think that would be good news, huh?"

"You don't exactly like the idea of him knowing you're not going in it, do you?" asked Tom, knowingly.

"Not exactly," Spiffy admitted. "But he'll have to know it afterward, so what's the difference?"

"Not much and yet a whole lot," Tom smiled. "He'd probably want to see you before the thing started if he came beforehand. That would ball things up, wouldn't it?"

"Kind of," said Spiffy.

Tom gave him a friendly slap on the shoulder and hurried away. "Things will come out all right, Spiff," he called back. "Don't worry. See you later."

That was just like Tom, Spiffy thought, as he watched him hurrying away. He had a way of knowing things and yet not knowing them at all.

"Anyhow, I *am* glad he's not coming before," the boy said aloud. "But I wonder how Tom knew I would be."

He looked up at the gathering clouds and then noticed that little groups of scouts were assembling around the float and the boat landing. The judge's stand, gay with bunting, was now occupied by Pee-wee Harris. That redoubtable little scout was giving it a tryout, thought Spiffy, and it made him smile.

Mr. Temple would not occupy it; possibly Mr. Wainwright would send them off. At any rate, it would not be for his benefit so he turned his back on the whole group and started around the lake. He had in mind a little eminence on the other side from which he could watch the race.

By the time he arrived there the heavens were rumbling ominously. There was not a bright space in the whole sky but on the other side of the lake the preparations seemed now completed. He gave his head a dubious little shake and sat down.

The contestants had assembled on the float and he tried to pick them out with his mind's eye. He knew just about where each one would start off and as the shouts and laughter reached him he had a momentary pang of regret, and

indulged in the hope that Addison would be thinking sympathetically of him.

He had lots of time to think it all over while he waited and he tried to reconcile one thought with the other. Perhaps Warde would feel differently after he understood and then things would be the same as before. He hoped that it would be so with everyone whom he had disappointed.

Neither Warde nor the others were angry, he knew—they just couldn't understand so they left him alone. Consequently he felt almost joyful that the race was soon to start and in a few hours things would be straightened out.

His uncle had promised to be around and Spiffy had planned when Mr. Temple was free to tell him the whole story and then they would go up Jeb's Trail and get the stolen silver. There was to be nothing surreptitious about it and the boy resolved never again to go to such lengths in the interests of loyalty.

The breeze suddenly turned into a strong, almost cold wind and the thunder broke. Rain drenched the earth and Spiffy got up and

ran for the shelter of some trees near by. Then the crack of a pistol told him that the race was on.

He craned his neck to see the last of the figures diving off the float. His heart seemed suddenly to become a lump in his throat. *He* was not one of them. The echoes of the send-off could be heard above the swish of the rain and he wished for one short moment that the cries of "good luck" were for him.

Now and again he could see the arms of the swimmers rise and fall and he wondered which of the arms were Addison's. He found himself unconsciously rooting for his new friend and erstwhile competitor, and stepped back to the eminence again in his excitement and anxiety.

Any one of Temple Camp's pioneers can tell you that Black Lake's behavior in a bad storm is not commendable. They can tell you that during the camp's many summer seasons most of the lives lost had been in the lake storms. They call them that because the gentle body of water suddenly becomes a raging, turbulent

monstrosity at the first few feet of rain that beats upon it.

Spiffy thought of this as he watched the little white caps forming out in the center. He had heard of it many times since he had arrived at camp but this was his first view of the quiet water starting on its annual rampage.

Warde had told him that a peculiar, swift undertow formed in a storm and that it was one of the hardest things to combat. He wondered how many would be able to overcome it.

The rain soaked him through and through but he was oblivious to everything except the arms moving and moving yet seeming not to come much nearer. And with sinking heart the boy saw that his side of the lake was fast becoming a series of whirlpools.

Suddenly he heard the booming of a voice through a megaphone. He could not distinguish the words, but common sense told him it was a command for the contestants to turn back.

Impulsively he ran back to the tree and shin-

nied up. From there he could see them better and he was relieved to see the bobbing heads going back the way they had come. But as he looked and his eyes became used to the distance he saw one head that had not turned about with the rest.

He pulled himself farther out along the branch and watched that head coming, coming. It was past the center now and the arms seemed to rise and fall over the white caps with much more effort than heretofore.

"Gee, he sure is stubborn!" Spiffy said admiringly. "He's a fool to think he can buck it clean across."

There came more booming from the megaphone. The other contestants had all returned as far as Spiffy could see. They were getting up on the float, but the head kept bobbing on.

The whirlpools kept spreading and spreading and it seemed to Spiffy that they were almost up to the lone swimmer. He held his breath as he saw one arm come up without the other following shortly after it.

He waited but it did not come. Was he try-

ing to drift now? No, there was an arm again —just one. Then another pause and the arm came into view again.

What was happening?

Spiffy thought that hours must have passed before he spied the head again. But the arms did not rise. "He's not going to make it, I know he's not!" he shouted. "He's a fool not to have turned back!"

The head seemed to be swirling around in one place now and Spiffy's nerves were all a-tingle. He knew what it meant. "He's got caught in that undertow, that's what!" he cried as he flung himself back and down on the ground again.

He seemed not to take into consideration that the danger would be as great for him as for the lone swimmer, but kicked off his shoes and plunged into the foaming water.

CHAPTER XXV

A TURN OF THE PAGE

Once he heard the boom of the megaphone, but after that the roar of the storming lake shut out everything else. The whirling pools seemed to be shoving him along.

He was glad of that because he knew that he would need all his strength when he got to the center. It was a question of whether he should continue or turn back with his charge. He smiled inwardly at that thought.

"Maybe somebody'll have to help me," he said, pantingly. "This sure takes a feller's wind."

Wind or no wind, he went on and the bobbing head reassured him. But he didn't know how long it would stay there because he was sure he heard a faint call in the wake of a bolt of thunder.

"Coming!" he cried as loud as he could. "Just drift!"

He was relieved to hear an answering cry.

Presently the head seemed to be coming nearer to him but he almost laughed aloud when he realized that it was his own speed that produced that mirage. And soon he was in the center of the whirlpool.

Nearer and nearer he got and at last a long sweep of his right arm brought him to his goal. He did not have time to be glad or sad that his charge was Addison Upp. He simply had to grab the boy and keep on going.

"Just keep your feet going, Add," he gasped quickly. "It'll help me better if you let me do it all."

"That's all I can do is to move my feet, Spiff," the boy answered with a ring of feeling in his voice. "My arms seem to be paralyzed —I can't move 'em at all."

"You should worry," said Spiffy between breaths. "I'm a'right, but this is something to get out of."

Addison was perfectly contented to be towed

along for he fainted and Spiffy was thankful. It made his burden lighter.

He decided to keep on and not turn back as he had first thought of doing. It was better to circle the whirlpool and get out of the undertow that way. With a firm grasp on Addison's body he pulled around and saw a boat coming toward them.

But Spiffy was too excellent a swimmer to need any aid. Each stroke of his strong, tanned arm pulled them nearer shore and before the boat had passed the float, he was upon them.

The cries and shouts were deafening. Peewee Harris was bellowing through the megaphone and Roy Blakeley made a peculiar sound like a steamboat whistle in a fog. The boat was by his side now and he smiled happily as he leaned over and helped put Addison into the care of some of his own patrol. Then Warde put out his hand and pulled him in.

"It's a go," said Warde feelingly.

"What's a go?" asked Spiffy, trying not to shiver.

"Aw, I don't know," said Warde. "Whatever I said about you winning the race."

Spiffy smiled. "Add won it," he said.

"You got to show me how!" said Bad Manners. "You came clear across, didn't you?"

Tom was standing on the boat landing, smiling, almost beaming. "Well, you kids can't argue about that now. Mr. Temple will decide it soon enough. Anyway, I'm satisfied with my choice."

"So'm I," said Warde proudly.

Addison was coming around nicely so Spiffy betook himself to his cabin and changed his clothes. He felt none the worse for his experience and looked forward exultantly to Mr. Temple's arrival.

"I hope it clears up by then," he said aloud as he hopped into some warm, dry khaki.

"By when?" asked Tom, entering.

"You can imagine," Spiffy laughed. "What do you know about my trouble anyhow, huh?"

"More than you think, kiddo," answered Tom. "I got a telegram the same morning as you did."

"From Mr. Temple?"

Tom nodded. "He told me what Addison Upp had wired and gave me all the dope. I just put two and two together and it made you a hundred percent—see?"

Spiffy was puzzled. "Gee, I must be dumb. How did . . ."

"Addison told him that you called Captain, Uncle Bill, and Mr. Temple gave me the full description of your supposedly lost relative," Tom interposed. "You asked me to give him more work, didn't you, kiddo?"

"I get you now," said Spiffy. "That gave it away too—when you thought of all those things, huh?"

"Exactly," said Tom. "And Addison wouldn't say anything except that you had an aunt that was awfully good to you since your mother and father died."

"She's been peachy to me," said Spiffy. "That's why I didn't say anything. My uncle . . ."

"I know," said Tom. "He's a scamp, Spiff, and I know it. He's been playing on your sym-

pathies just on account of your aunt, if I'm not badly mistaken."

"Did—did he steal your money?" Spiffy asked.

Tom smiled. "So you found it out too, huh? Well, I'm positive he did, kiddo. But I had it hushed down for your sake. I thought that if he needed the money as bad as that, why, he could keep it and that maybe your aunt would benefit by it. I decided not to say anything more about it—he wasn't getting much money here and I suppose the temptation was too great."

"But I wouldn't let him get away with that," Spiffy said, indignantly. "Even Aunt Kate wouldn't want that kind of money, gee whiz."

"Well, we'll consider it a present now," said Tom. "I intend to let him know that I know he has it. He's done a lot of work here all right and it's easily worth that much so I'm going to shame him by teaching him a little bit of scout ritual. And as for the silver, Spiff—you're the only one who is on to the latitude and longitude of the cache."

Spiffy smiled. "Well, I'll get it, don't worry. It's just up Jeb's trail about five hundred feet."

"That means about two hundred, eh?" Tom laughed.

"Around that," answered Spiffy. "Gee, I think it's going to clear anyhow," he said looking out of the window.

"When we're going to bed," said Tom.

They heard a familiar honk, honk at that juncture and looked out through the window in time to see Ben Maxwell's flivver careening crazily into camp.

"I bet Ben went up and got him," said Tom musingly.

"Who?" asked Spiffy.

"J. T. He couldn't get that big car of his down through Jeb's Trail, you know."

"Gee, that's right," said Spiffy. "I didn't think of that."

"He's getting out now," Tom observed.

"Who?" Spiffy asked.

"Now, who do you think!" Tom laughed.

"I know!" Spiffy enthused. "Gee, at last!"

CHAPTER XXVI

DOWN JEB'S TRAIL

Tom left the cabin to greet his employer and Spiffy hurried with his dressing. He wondered where and how he would talk to the kind, benevolent man and during his musing he got an idea.

Dressed, he crossed the room and emptied the contents of his bag onto a nearby bunk. Then he shut it and holding it tightly in his hand emerged from his cabin as stealthily as possible.

Everyone was crowding about Administration Shack to get a glimpse of Mr. Temple. Spiffy took advantage of the excitement and hurried through the dripping trees into Jeb's Trail. It was deserted.

In a few moments he reached the turning in place and soon sighted the log. How quickly he had made it, he thought, and how different

from the night that he had followed his uncle there.

Then he stepped over the log, looked and stopped. The earth was in a state of upheaval around it and as Spiffy stooped over to look a cry of dismay escaped his lips.

There was a large cavity in the ground and the silver was gone!

His bag dropped out of his hand and landed on the soft earth with a thud. All thought and action seemed to have left him. Tom's words rang in his ears: "Your uncle is a scamp, Spiff!"

How well he knew it now.

"And he promised me he wouldn't go till tonight," Spiffy said, listlessly, picking up the empty bag again. "He promised me, but he's gone."

He started back for the trail, almost creeping along. There was almost nothing to go back for, he thought. He couldn't face them—he couldn't. "It serves me right," he said and his eyes were misty. "I shouldn't have trusted

him, I shouldn't. I should have given that stuff to Tom yesterday, today—oh, long ago when it first happened."

He did not go in the direction of camp when he stepped into the trail. Instead he walked on up to the little rustic bench where the Catskill bus stops. There he sat down.

He hadn't any definite plan and it wasn't until the chugging of two motorcycles aroused him that he thought of going to Catskill and then—well, he wasn't sure from there. "Anyway, I can't go back now," he said listlessly.

In a few minutes the motorcycles swerved around and stopped directly in front of him. Their riders were state police and one held a small sized grip over the handlebars.

He smiled pleasantly at Spiffy. "Is it safe for us to chug into your camp by this trail?" he asked.

"Sure," Spiffy answered. "Ben Maxwell does it with his flivver every day—he's a feller in camp."

Both men laughed. The one with the grip

winked cordially. "Well, if you're going that way why you can hop on back and have a nice rough ride."

"Er—er," stammered Spiffy nervously.

"Now, don't get scared, kid," the man laughed. "We ain't going to pull anybody in down there or nothing like that. We're just returning a little silver that belongs to the boss of your camp."

"*Silver!*" Spiffy echoed. "Where—where . . ."

"We found it with a hobo that was doing odd jobs for you people," the man explained. "That is, we found it lying alongside of what used to be him and we called up your camp and got the whole dope."

Spiffy blanched. "Do you mean—you mean the man was . . ."

"He was hit by a bus down the road here," the officer interposed. "It was during the worst of the storm and I guess he didn't hear it coming. Anyway, he was knocked into smithereens."

"And he's dead," said Spiffy in a monotone.

"Yeh," said the man. "Dead as they make 'em. It's lucky though because he was making a getaway. He grabbed off some coin in your camp too. We found it in his pockets."

"Let's go," said the other officer.

"Want to come along then, kid?" the smiling one asked Spiffy.

Spiffy took up his bag and straddled the motorcycle. "I'll hold it in back of me, kind of," he said, quietly.

"Just as you say, kid," said the man. "Only be sure and hold on good with the other hand. I hear this is a tough ride on a fly wheel."

Spiffy held on and they started down Jeb's Trail.

CHAPTER XXVII

A SMILING AWARD

It was Tom who brought him into Mr. Temple's smiling presence. They walked into Mr. Wainwright's office in Administration Shack, the young assistant camp manager's arm flung about the boy's shoulder.

"Well, well," said Mr. Temple. "You've had quite some experiences this summer, Arnold, haven't you?"

Spiffy nodded. "I never thought things would turn out like they have. But I got to apologize, Mr. Temple."

"All right, Arnold," Mr. Temple said kindly. "It's a good thing to get out of your system. Apologies clutter the mind."

Spiffy smiled. "Well, then, you don't believe that I . . ."

"Now, no more," Mr. Temple laughed.

SPIFFY TOOK UP HIS BAG AND STRADDLED THE MOTORCYCLE.

"You're forgiven for whatever you think you didn't do right. We know you're all wool, Arnold—Mr. Hollister, Tom and myself. Else why do you think we picked you as a winner?"

"That was an accident, sort of," answered Spiffy. "I didn't intend to go in it."

"I know all about that too," said Mr. Temple. "Tom kept me well informed and I had no misgivings about you—not once."

"You would have if you had seen him beating that undertow," Tom said. "I mean you would have had misgivings as to his safety. I thought sure he wouldn't make it."

"Well, I did," Spiffy said proudly.

"You always try and do what you resolve to do, don't you, Arnold?" Mr. Temple asked.

"Yeh," said Spiffy. "But I don't want Addison to get left on the award just because he got caught in that undertow. Maybe if I had been swimming that way I wouldn't have made it either."

"I think you would have," said Mr. Temple. "That's how much confidence I have in your pluck, Arnold. But don't worry about young

Upp. We don't do things half way in Temple Camp."

"You can't give two awards," Tom laughed. "Not the Rhodes anyway."

"I know it," said Mr. Temple. "But we'll get around that somehow. Suppose we make Spiffy an Eagle Scout first and then offer him the choice of two awards. The Rhodes Award and the Mary Temple Award—how's that?"

Spiffy's eyes glistened. "Do you say I can choose?"

Mr. Temple nodded.

"I'll take the Mary Temple award then. I'll like it especially because—on account of your daughter Mary. She smiled at me once —two years ago."

Mr. Temple laughed. "That's settled then," he said. "And while we're talking things over I was wondering how you'd like helping Tom out this winter. In our camp office in Bridgeboro, I mean. You could be a sort of office boy to him and keep on with your schooling. We'll arrange some way as long as you insist on paying Mr. Hollister something."

"I—I'd like it, gee, Mr. Temple you don't know how I'd like it," said Spiffy. "But I suppose I ought to go and get a real job and not bother with school. I suppose I ought to on account of Aunt Kate. She's got nobody now since Uncle Bill . . ."

"What do you mean, Arnold?" asked Mr. Temple, plainly puzzled. "What's this about your Aunt Kate?"

"Well, how would she get along all alone?" Spiffy returned. "There she's in New York . . ."

Mr. Temple shook his head. "Arnold, my dear boy," he said. "There must be some mistake. Your poor aunt met with a tragic death —you knew that, didn't you? Why, my housekeeper and I were summoned by the police to identify her a few days after you left for camp. Her body was found way down the bay where it must have drifted after the cyclone."

Spiffy stood mute for a moment. "Then Uncle Bill lied to me about that too, huh?" he asked quietly.

"If he told you otherwise he did," Mr. Tem-

ple answered. "I am here to assure you, my boy, that it was she I identified and no one else. I've talked to her too much and pitied her not to know . . ."

"I told Spiff he was a scamp," Tom interposed. "And I was right. But it's neither here nor there, he's not alone, not at all."

"I know I'm not," said Spiffy with glistening eyes. "But still I'm not sorry I was loyal. Anyhow I'll never be sorry for that."

THE END

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